# Marxism Today

September 84 75p

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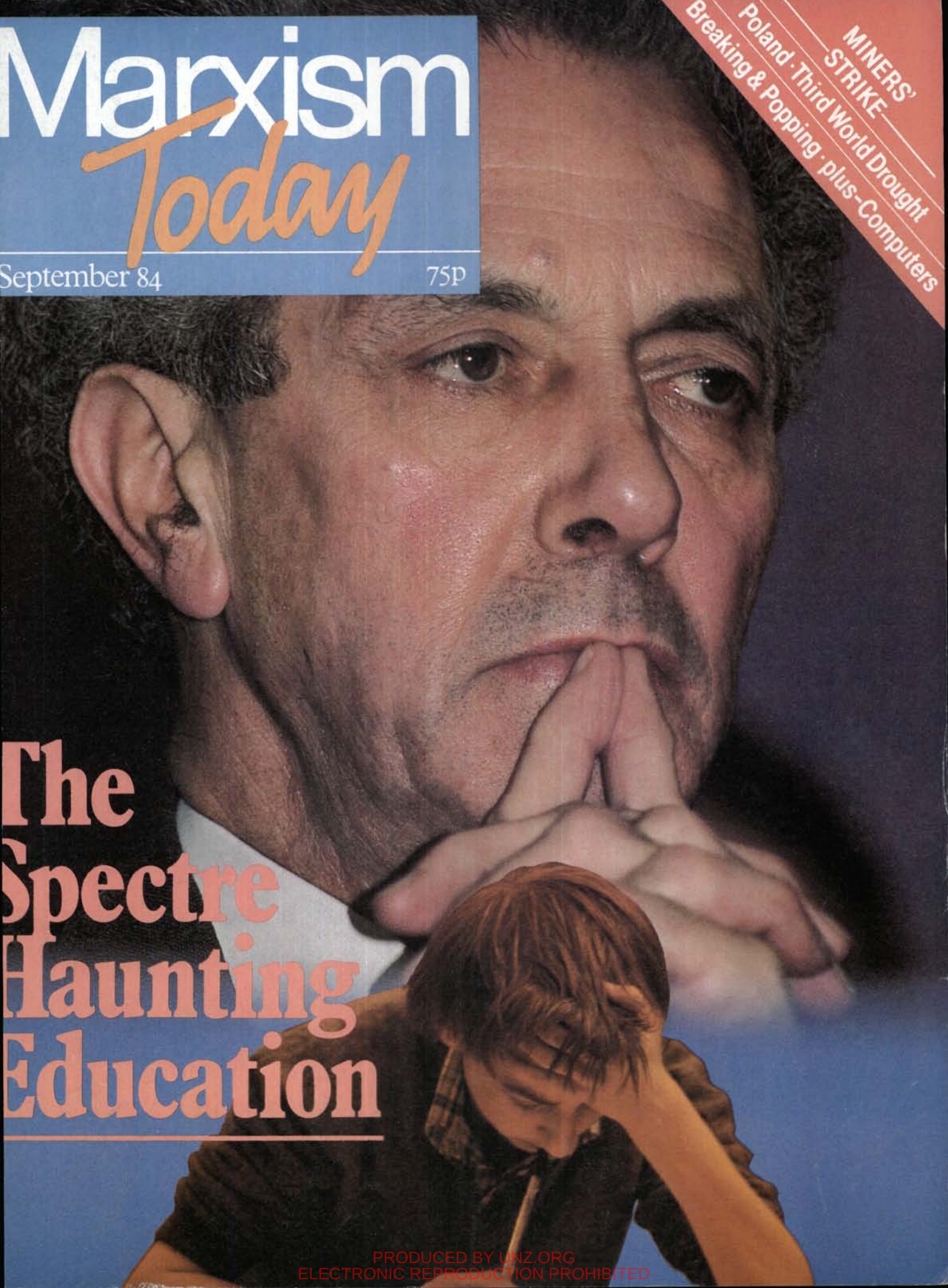

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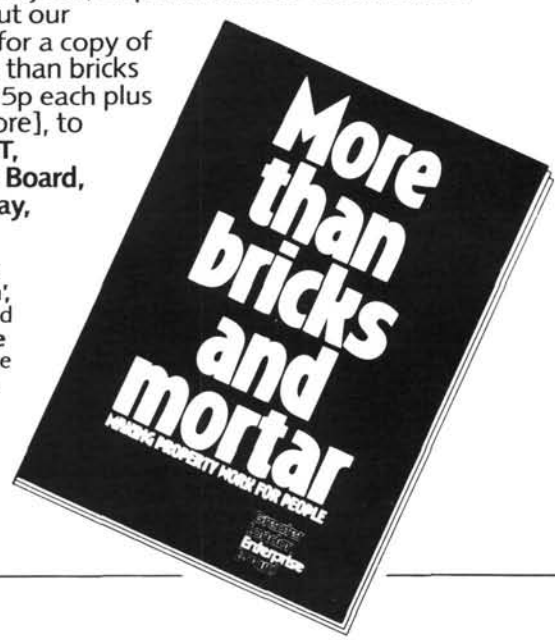


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# Marxism Today

Theoretical and discussion journal of the Communist Party

SEPTEMBER · 1984 VOLUME 28 NUMBER 9



BMA



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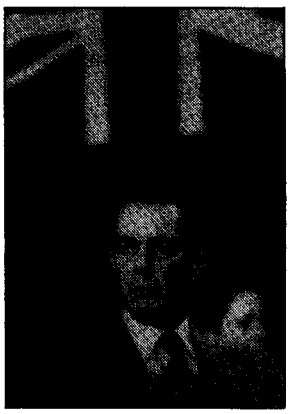

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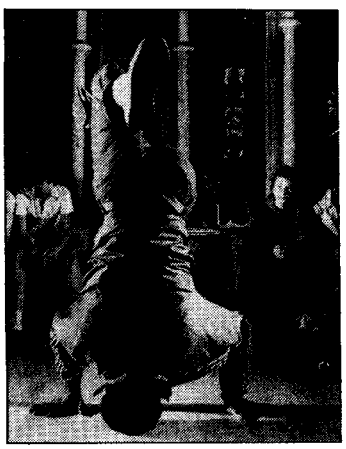

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## LABOUR'S BLACK SECTIONS

One of the problems for Labour's broad church is that every now and again, a section of the congregation will leap to its feet and shout for a place at the altar. This year it's Labour's black members, who, bruised and aggrieved by what they see as the party's indifference to them and their needs, are campaigning for constitutional reforms that would ensure them a voice at all levels of the party.

Most blacks have always seen the Labour Party as their natural political home, partly because of its claim to represent the poor, and partly because the Conservatives of the past carried the whiff of cork hatted colonialism, and those of today the stench of suppressed racism. For the past 25 years up to last year, four out of every five black or Asian voters who went to the polls plumped for Labour. Most of those who got involved in the Labour Party itself have always seen themselves as good soldiers, who would turn out the vote and in the fullness of time find themselves a part of a party with a multiracial leadership that would then proceed to do, in government, all the things that have become emotional symbols of political good faith with Britain's black communities.

But somewhere along the line the vision wavered. Repeal of discriminatory immigration laws always proved impossible; the racial equality programmes were never quite strong enough; and Labour's own leadership remained resolutely monochrome. However, some hoped that the most potent political symbol of all – a black MP – might have come out of last year's general election. It might have marked the accession of black people to a permanent place in British society.

Unfortunately, once again this proved just beyond the horizon. No black candidate was selected to fight a winnable seat. And the man who came closest to being selected for one found himself the victim of a cruel humiliation.

Russell Profitt, councillor, ex-National Union of Students vice president, regular media performer and party stalwart is probably pretty close to the model of the modern Labour candidate. He won selection in Battersea North, but lost the selection to sitting MP Alf Dubs when the boundaries were changed. It wasn't defeat that infuriated Profitt and his black colleagues; it was the desertion of almost everyone who had previously voted for him in Battersea North. He lost the selection by 60 votes to three (two of whom were black). Most blacks saw this as proof that even the relatively leftish local parties weren't to be relied upon to help satisfy black demands. And worse still they could see the beginnings of a disillusioned drift away from Labour in the 1983 election. Some observers believe that it was blacks' lack of enthusiasm that led to the defeat of luminaries like Joan Lestor and Patricia Hewitt, both of whom lost narrowly in seats with large black populations.

To the black activists the reason for the decline is clear; a lack of black influence in the party and an absence of black figures in its leadership. The solution is equally simple. According to one Birmingham councillor, James Hunte, as long as blacks are 'nice boys, the Labour Party would just take them for granted. We're not nice boys anymore'.

Hunte showed what he meant by recruiting several hundred black members to his Birmingham Ladywood constituency to form a voting block that gave him effective control, until the party's NEC instituted an inquiry into his running of the party. A similar drive in Brent produced the largest single group of non-white councillors anywhere in the country by the simple expedient of signing up new members, deselecting sitting white councillors and replacing them with black and Asian candidates.

In the aftermath of the general election, a group of the black activists met to try to work out how this type of black organisation could be used to strengthen their position in the party. They came up with the idea of 'black sections'. The sections would operate like the youth or women's sections of the party, with closed meetings and the right to elect members from within the section to the party's top bodies. At the last count more than a dozen local parties had set up black sections.

None of this had been greeted favourably by the Labour leadershp. In the space of one week no less than three senior Labour spokesmen – Kinnock, Hattersley, and Kaufman – hand condemned the black sections as 'retrograde' and 'divisive'. They clearly have a vision of yet another damaging internal struggle, gloated over by the Fleet Street press, and more importantly hastening the drift away from Labour towards a centrist alliance so far untainted by the need to satisfy interest groups within the party.

Behind the concern for party unity lies a deeper anxiety that has dogged Labour for 20 years. It is that any suspicion of the party being too nice to blacks would provoke an electoral backlash amongst whites. According to one of the campaign's leaders, the party has 'done its sums': the number of black votes it might forfeit by disappointing the activists are massively outweighed by the number of white votes it would lose by conceding the demand for black sections. Kinnock's public opposition especially annoyed the black caucus. The gradualism that both he and Kaufman counselled in television interviews, was precisely what they felt had allowed Labour to ignore blacks. In response, they have organised enough resolutions in support of their view to ensure that the issue is debated at October's conference. Several resolutions call for the setting up of black sections locally, and instruct the NEC to

*Russell Profitt*

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bring forward constitutional changes to create a national black section.

That debate is sure to produce some embarrassment for the NEC. Its own working party on race, besides meeting only infrequently, has found it difficult to get a response from most constituencies. Consequently, it seems unlikely that it will have much of significance to report to conference.

The trade union delegations, always nervous when debates about race stray off the safe territory of bashing the Tories, may also find the black caucus' approach too hard to take. Any decision to support black sections in principle might lead to two problems. First, the relative weakening of trade union influence at local level; and second, demands for the right to independent caucusses within the unions. Such a debate could be explosive, as one non-Labour Party union, NALGO, has already found out. On the other hand several of the large unions have significant numbers of black members, who might just become restive if their leaders vote against a resolution that appears to be in their interests. The National Union of Public Employees is certain to back the call for black sections, but where others with large numbers of black members will fall is anybody's guess. The resonse at the TUC to NALGO's motion calling for black members' groups may provide a pointer.

Whichever way the Labour Conference jumps will present problems for Neil Kinnock. If the black sections resolution falls there is little doubt that several local Labour Parties will defy the national party, and set up unofficial black sections. If it is passed, not only will the vote now be represented as a personal defeat for Kinnock; it will also be viewed by many of Labour's traditional supporters as another example of Labour's leaders giving in to yet one more minority grouping.

It is likely that conference will agree to allow local parties to set up black sections at a constituency level. It may also instruct the party's leaders to consider the possibility of a national black section with a right to places on the national executive. This will almost certainly provide the black activists with the tactical victory they want: an unofficial network of local sections offers a convenient mechanism through which they can agitate for even more radical reform in 1985.

Whichever way the vote goes, Labour's black activists seem to have guaranteed another long running rumpus in the best Labour tradition.

*Trevor Phillips*

## SOCIAL SECURITY — REVIEWS AND REFORMS

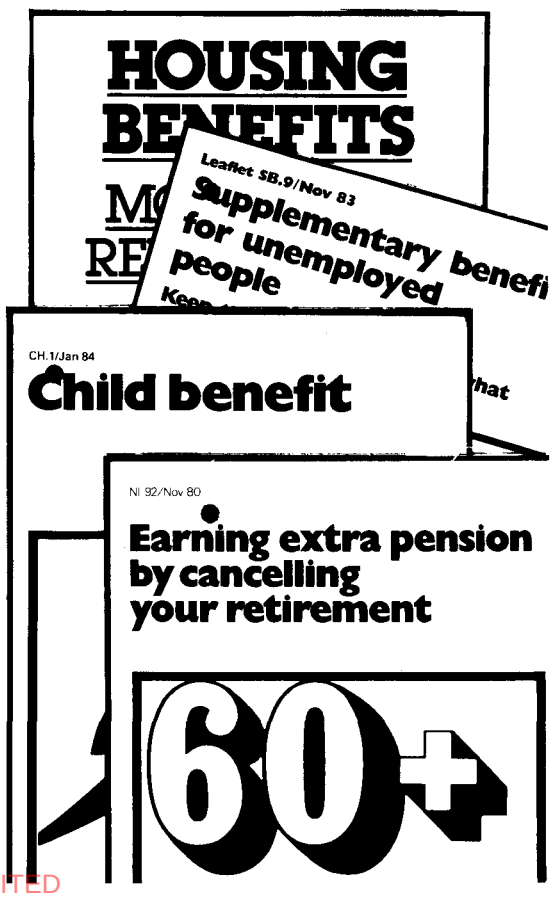
Radical reform of social security is at last on the political agenda — put there not by the Left but by the Government with their 'most substantial examination of the system since the Beveridge report 40 years ago', and by a new school of liberal values, the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS), in *The Reform of Social Security*.

The Government's substantial examination is in fact four separate reviews of provisions for retirement, benefits for children and young people, Housing Benefit and Supplementary Benefit, though their findings will be co-ordinated by a central unit. This separation and the areas chosen for review make one immediately suspicious in the light, for example, of the attacks that have recently been made on Housing Benefit and benefits for the young. SB is certainly now the major social security provision in Britain, taking the iniquities of means-testing to an increasing proportion of the population — 7 million people depend on it. But the DHSS Review in 1978, commissioned by Labour, did nothing to question the fundamental problems with such a scheme, and merely provided evidence for the Tories' 'nil-cost' 1980 reforms. The framework of the new review gives little more hope when the key issues for consultation are largely restricted to simplifying the administration of existing benefits and reducing the burden on staff (or should it be staffing).

SB is expensive to administer, and claimants would certainly benefit from a simpler scheme. But the complications arise because of the nature of the system, for instance, the relationship with National Insurance benefits, and the reviews appear to have no remit to consider such issues. That our complex, means-tested schemes are alienating and stigmatising to claimants, of course, is no coincidence — such features have a clear ideological role in isolating and controlling those who suffer most from economic injustice. This Government is not going to reverse this, and until social security is on the agenda as a means of redistributing wealth and power reviews restricted to administration of existing benefits are likely to be a snare for the unwary social reformer.

Where the Government appears unwilling to question the broader structure of provision, however, the new IFS study is prepared boldly to step. Armed with the almost unanswerable claim that new technology makes more thorough reform of social security possible than hitherto thought, they argue that the time is right for a complete restructuring of the system. They point to commonly identified problems with current benefits: overlap between NI and SB, high administrative cost, the unemployment trap (families better off on benefits than at work), low take-up, and the poverty trap (the problem that wage increases for low earners may provide no extra real income because of the failure to integrate the tax system with the provision of means-tested subsidies to wages). These problems could all be solved, they claim, by a joint tax-benefit system, providing a benefit credit for everyone which is then withdrawn by the tax system as income rises. All this could be done by computer on an annual basis, doing away with the nasty business of detailed means-testing and a lot of civil service staff.

The most important *caveat* is that the reforms suggested, although moving beyond existing benefits, are still purely administrative: they would target benefits better, notably by increasing take-up, but they would not change the basic distribution and thus the biggest problems for claimants — the fact that benefit levels are too low. Furthermore, without redistribution any integration of taxes and benefits only mitigates the poverty trap by institutionalising it, with marginal tax rates of around 80%. Predicated as it is on the basis

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of providing for poor families, the scheme also ignores the issue of independent entitlement to benefit for men *and* women, irrespective of family status.

The IFS assure us that their scheme is neutral as regards benefit levels and could be used to provide more for the poor if political and economic factors allowed; but that in current circumstances the priority should be ensuring that existing provision goes to those in most need.

But selective, means-tested benefits serve to isolate and stigmatise the poor by making individual (or family) need the justification for receipt of state support, and by withdrawing this as rapidly as possible (high marginal tax rates) as soon as people can be expected to provide for themselves. This disguises the fact that poverty is really only the sharp end of inequality and is not caused by individual failure — some people are poor because other people are rich. Any proposals for change must tackle this question of distribution.

In the long term this may best be achieved by a fundamental break with the division between wages and benefits and the payment of a basic income to all individuals irrespective of employment or family status. Such a plan has recently been proposed by the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) and submitted as evidence to the government reviews. The plan has not been costed and the NCVO admits that it could not be introduced now, although it is somewhat ironic that the Government's more restricted reviews should create the space for others to make radical suggestions.

A basic benefit for all at a level on which people can live implies a challenge to the whole ethos of work for which neither the Left nor the Right is well-prepared, but which is now coming on to the agenda.

In the meantime, however, there are alternatives to current benefits which do tackle seriously the basic issue of redistribution: increased flat-rate benefit for all individual non wage earners irrespective of contributions or means tests, a realistic minimum wage, and an integration of tax and benefit structure which pushes the cost of state support to where it can most fairly be met through a more steeply progressive tax structure with the highest rates at the top, not the bottom, of the income scale. Labour now has teams looking again at social security policy — it is these priorities, and not those of administrative reform that should be setting their agenda.

*Pete Alcock*

## POLES TOGETHER

The Polish amnesty, enabling the release of 650 political prisoners, was presented as a humanitarian act made possible by the progress towards 'normalisation' exemplified in the outcome of the local elections in June.

It could also be interpreted as a sign of weakness. To solve its economic problems Poland needs more loans from the West, and releasing political prisoners provided a pretext for abandoning the potentially highly embarrassing trial of four former activists of KOR. Over the preceding months Kuron, Michnik, Romaszewski and Wujec had turned down offers of release on condition that they refrained from political activity for 2½ years, or that they emigrated. Regarding themselves as innocent, they demanded to be tried or released unconditionally. The trial itself was closed to the Western press, but no evidence has ever been made public that could substantiate the accusation of an attempt to overthrow the state by violent means.

The amnesty was not simply a concession forced on the Polish authorities; in a sense it is an indication both of strength and of weakness. The Polish leadership, although it would love to emulate the kind of 'normalisation' achieved in Hungary in the years since 1956, seems to have accepted that there is little hope of eliminating organised opposition in the foreseeable future. Nevertheless, harsh repression has overcome the direct challenge to its monopoly of power. Fully aware that brutality wins no friends, the regime's strategy is to make its repression as inconspicuous as possible and to switch to containment whenever it can.

Their ultimate perspective was recently outlined by Krassucki, editor of the party's theoretical journal, who seemed fully aware of the regime's political weakness. He hoped that in a few years the economy could be recovering and living standards improving. People would then start to say 'They were right, it was very unpleasant, it was a great shock what they did in December 1981, but because after that they have shown that they can lead the country in a direction we approve of — or can accept — we will forgive them'.

He did not deny that this might not happen. Although there are some signs of economic recovery it will be a long time before living standards are back even to the level of the late 1970s. While agreements have enabled the rescheduling of debts with the West, Poland has been hit hard by a dramatic rise in the price charged for Soviet oil.

These difficulties have added significance in view of the continued existence of Solidarity. It has certainly suffered from repression and many of its leading activists have emigrated. Nevertheless, it still has workplace organisations, it produces papers, and undertakes propaganda including sporadic radio broadcasts. According to Bogdan Lis, one of its best known leaders who was recently arrested, it still has one

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million dues paying members. That is a very serious potential threat to the authorities, but they may feel it has to be tolerated for a time in the hope that continuing police harrassment and comparatively mild repression will be enough to persuade more Solidarity activists that their struggle is hopeless. The regime is, of course, fully equipped with the powers to stamp on any mass protests.

Keeping visible repression to a minimum is especially helpful for winning the acquiescence of the Catholic Church. It has been pressing its own demands for a legal recognition of its place in society: it has continually indicated disquiet at persecution and it has repeatedly suggested that Solidarity should be allowed to renew its activities, but it has also periodically distanced itself from calls for strikes or demonstrations. It could even be won to give guarded praise to the authorities — at a price. It is very widely assumed that pressure from the church was important in persuading the regime to implement the amnesty, which was quickly welcomed by Cardinal Glemp.

It is against this complex background that the regime can assess its progress towards 'normalisation'. It has a base. It now claims 4½ million members in the new trade unions. That, of course, is less than half the former membership of Solidarity and the new unions seem to be especially weak in large industrial enterprises.

The significance of the local elections in June — for which the authorities claimed a 75% turnout — was that Solidarity had staked a great deal on campaigning for a boycott. The Government's press spokesman Jerzy Urban could claim that 'the overwhelming majority of the nation has boycotted the election boycott'. Solidarity, however, claimed that the results were rigged: their information was that the voting was between 45% and 60% depending on the region.

The authorities' conclusion was that they could afford to release Kuron and his colleagues. They have, after all, lived with illegal Solidarity organisations and a free Walesa for some time and street demonstrations have slowly subsided. Solidarity, and the church, insist that they must go further. The amnesty must be *unconditional* — it can now be revoked on repetition of the 'offence' — and an independent trade union movement must be allowed to exist alongside the new unions. That, they claim, is the only basis for genuine and lasting social harmony.

*Martin Myant*

## ETHICAL MEDICS

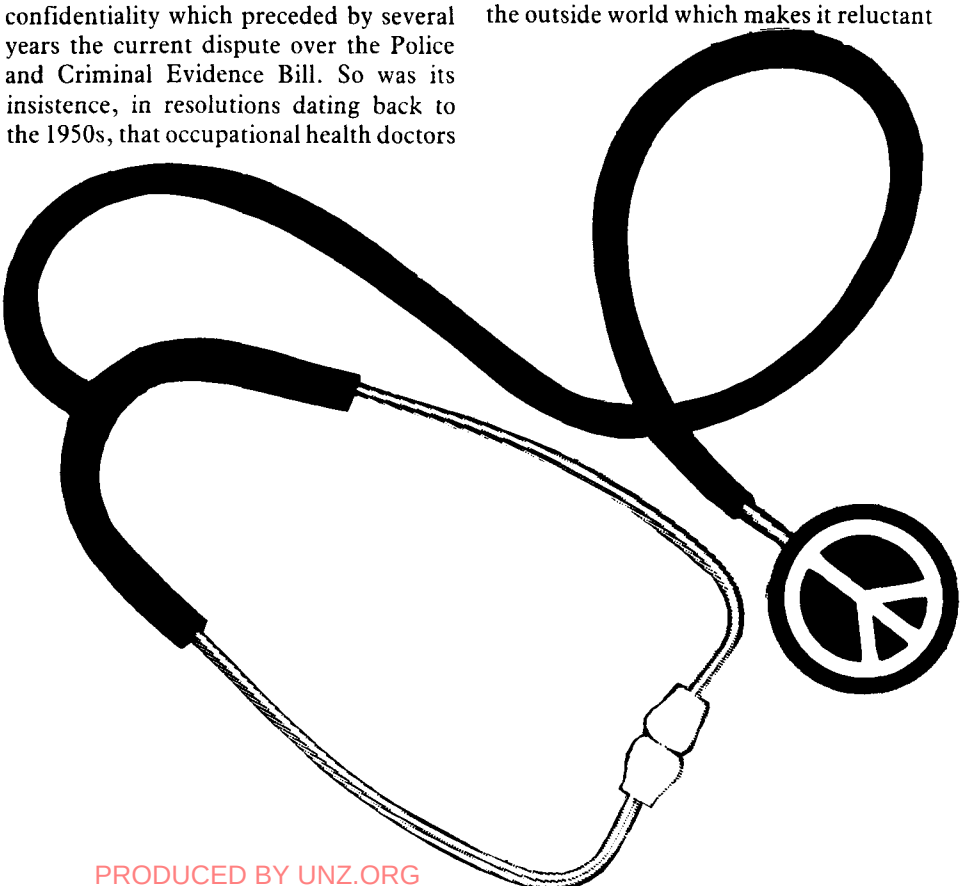
When the British Medical Association makes statements which contradict its reactionary image the assumption is made that the profession is at last moving to the left.

The recent Annual Representative Meeting of the BMA provides some grounds for that assumption. The decision was taken to remove tobacco shares from the portfolio of a BMA sponsored insurance brokerage. The conference reaffirmed its support for changes in the abortion law in Northern Ireland. Both of these decisions were taken against the advice of the platform. A resolution was passed calling for a vigorous campaign for the banning of boxing, and this is an issue that BMA leaders seem to be getting their teeth into. A resolution was passed calling for less spending on defence and more on health care, a considerable change from last year's decision to take no political stance on nuclear arms.

However we can find similar pointers to a leftward drift at many other occasions in the past. The BMA support of the campaign for the Elizabeth Garrett Anderson hospital was hailed as a first sign of a move to the left. So was its campaign on seat belt legislation, and its long standing policy on fluoridation. So was its conflict with the Association of Chief Police Officers over confidentiality which preceded by several years the current dispute over the Police and Criminal Evidence Bill. So was its insistence, in resolutions dating back to the 1950s, that occupational health doctors owe a greater responsibility to the workers in their company than to the company itself. So were some resolutions passed in the 1930s calling for universal national health insurance, resolutions which the BMA still quotes as evidence that it really supported the NHS all along.

So we should not read too much into the present signals — and we need to look more closely at the nature of medical politics. The medical profession grows out of a 150 year old battle. When the BMA was founded surgeons were craftsmen, physicians were domestic servants of the rich and apothecaries were tradesmen. Out of this unpromising material the BMA was to create a high status highly paid profession. It has also raised its own prestige. The BMA is a limited company,recognised by the Inland Revenue as a professional society, but also registered as a trade union. Membership is entirely voluntary (it now includes over two thirds of doctors, up from a trough of under half in the 1970s), although the BMA also acts as a secretariat for the officially recognised negotiating bodies of the profession in which all doctors participate. The battles of the past leave a deep psychological impression, and the attitudes they fostered are reproduced by the whole process of medical socialisation.

The profession has a small trader mentality, a deep suspicion of any planning or control, and an almost paranoid reaction to the outside world which makes it reluctant



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to share its power with any other group. Indeed it does not even recognise that it possesses the great power within the NHS that it actually does — it is more likely to perceive itself as buffeted by forces beyond its control. It clings to the establishment like the snobbish rising craft it used to be.

But there is also a fierce independence and distrust of authority. Conflicts with the police over confidentiality of medical records indicate a good record on civil liberties. There is a commitment to health and to patients and a willingness to champion their interests.

From these conflicting themes it is possible to see the areas in which the profession is liable to take up progressive attitudes and the areas in which it has always been reactionary.

Two further aspects of the profession's politics must also be understood. One is the unity of the profession (a precondition of the successful campaign to raise the profession's status) and the other is the depoliticiation of the profession (a precondition of its acceptance as a disinterested medical adviser, and paradoxically something which empowers left wing doctors by sheltering them within a non-political image). It is sometimes hard to see the depoliticisation amidst all the trappings of a sophisticated medicopolitical machinery. But that machinery is mainly concerned with conflict between the different sections of the profession, and it is really part of the process of negotiating the terms on which the unity of the profession can be maintained. Indeed the Left, in using the machinery for its ostensible purpose of discussing politics, is seen as betraying the profession by using the machinery of unity in a divisive way.

Conflict between depoliticisation and the political demands of the profession's commitment to health is resolved in a number of ways. The BMA will be overtly political where the interests of doctors are directly involved; on 'safe' political issues which are not at the cutting edge of party political conflict or of class conflict; and on issues of medical ethics, since these are the roots of the profession's respect.

Where an issue affects health care, but is not 'safe', the BMA will make supportive statements but will stay away from the battleground. Battles against health cuts, lying as they do at the centre of political schism, attract only patronage.

Public health is less legitimate than health care, and public health campaigns only take place on 'safe' issues. Smoking or seat belts do not strike at the root of class conflict or party conflict. On nuclear war or unemployment, which do, the profession is more circumspect. The furthest it will go in such areas is scientific legitimation; it supplies the scientific facts, authoritatively presented, but refuses to draw any conclusion. Progress was made this year on nuclear war because the resolution had been drafted in a vaguer and safer way, expressing everybody's hope for turning swords into ploughshares, and was safe enough to attract patronage.

The abortion in Northern Ireland decision was perhaps the most interesting issue because it marked a conflict between the 'safeness' of this issue to the bulk of the delegates and the 'unsafe politics' perception of the profession in Northern Ireland. The BMA Northern Ireland Council saw the issue, raised by young left wing doctors in the province, as unsafe politically and opposed it. The platform rallied round this point of view to preserve unity. The conference, seeing it as a safe issue, reacted to this attempt to run away from the profession's right to make an independent judgement and defeated the platform.

The good news is that the BMA isn't as bad as we've all always thought. The bad news is that it isn't getting better.

*Steve Watkins*

WHAT DID MARX, LENIN AND ANTONIO GRAMSCI HAVE IN COMMON?

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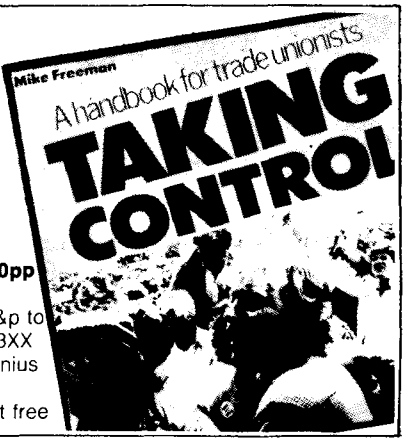


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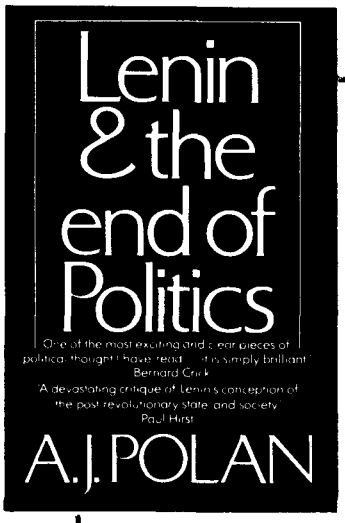
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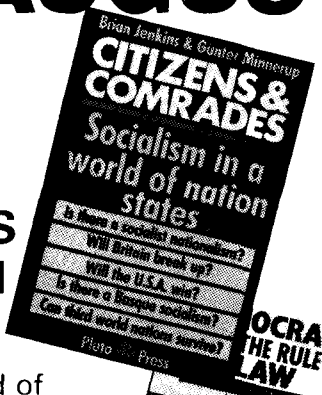
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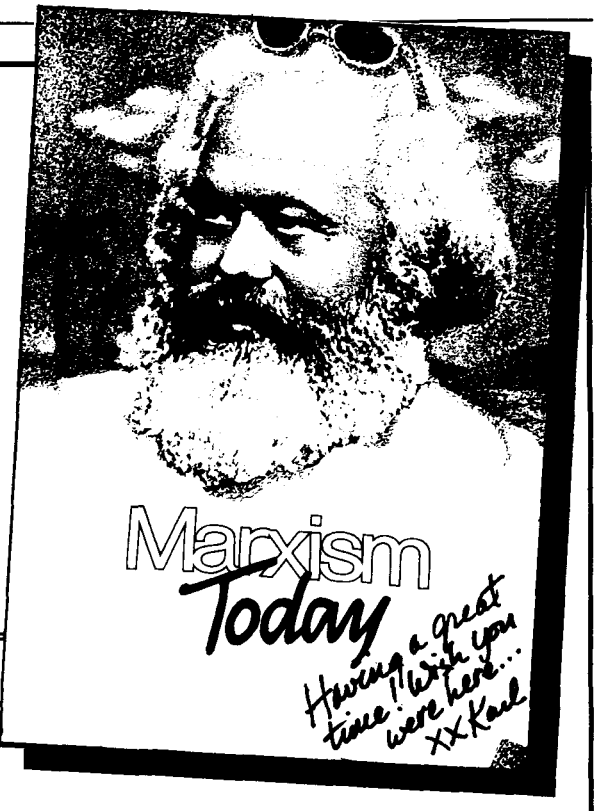


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**As the miners' strike moves into the autumn, it has become one of the longest national disputes this century. And, more to the point, a lot hangs on its outcome.**

# Strike to the Finish

## A roundtable discussion

**The participants in the roundtable are: Alan Baker, who is the Secretary of the Oakdale Lodge, South Wales Area of the NUM and a member of the Welsh Committee of the Communist Party; George Bolton, who is Vice-President of the Scottish Area of the NUM; and Jack Taylor, who is the President of the Yorkshire Area of the NUM, sits on the NUM National Executive and is a member of the Labour Party. It is chaired by John Lloyd, who is the Industrial and Labour Editor of the *Financial Times*.**

*Many miners' leaders claim that MacGregor was put into the National Coal Board by the Government in order to create a dispute, to bludgeon the miners into submission? Was it a purely political appointment and did the Government have a different kind of strategy in mind?*

**Alan Baker** In my opinion it was definitely a political appointment and I have no doubt that the Government has a strategy for the coal mining industry – much as they have for the rest of British industry. What they have in mind is developing electricity generation on the basis of nuclear power, and what uses of coal develop in the future, such as the extraction of oil, gasification and various fluidised bed combustion systems, will primarily depend on imported coal, and a few super-pits left in Britain which will be in the hands of the same oil companies that own pits abroad in Brazil, Zambia or wherever. I certainly think it was a political appointment. I also think there was some resentment among management circles in the NCB at the appointment because he was from outside and because he was an American.

**George Bolton** This government, almost from its very first day, took a very clear political decision to build nuclear power stations, for the specific purpose of attacking the mining industry and weakening the potential power of the miners' union. And, of course, MacGregor was the obvious choice for them because of his ruthlessness and ability to carry the task through. What was not part of the plan was a miners' strike, I don't think they envisaged that. They were convinced it would be thwarted by the recession, redundancy payments and transfer fees. They assumed they could do to the pits what they did to steel, without much real resistance. It's a tremendous tribute to this union and its leadership that in the most difficult circumstances they urged the miners to stand up and fight for the pits and for their jobs. The purpose of the appointment was clear: they haven't sunk one single new pit since they took office, the intention was a massive cutback in the mining industry. And they are attacking the NUM because they understand that if they can defeat it then, by comparison, others are relatively easier.

**Alan** I'm not sure that the centre of their strategy is to fight the NUM, though this is a very important plus for them. I think their strategy is to destroy a nationalised mining industry because they are not interested in the national economy of Britain, they want to develop the ownership of industry through multinational firms, including coal. There is some future for coal, and they know it. But they want it on a different basis.

**George** I wouldn't dispute that. That's their ultimate objective. But to get there you've got to weaken this union quite drastically.

**Jack Taylor** The Government's strategy is that to get where they want to go they have to exploit workers and to do that they have to have a weak NUM. MacGregor's biggest sin is that he can't carry out his duty because he doesn't understand miners. She appointed MacGregor, because he could carry out an instruction in a very hard, heartless way, but she doesn't understand miners. Even if he won this dispute outright, he would lose everything. After all, he can't run a coal industry without the NUM. She obviously wants to make a profit, it's part of the set up, and she can make more profit if she doesn't have workers standing in her way. The workers were getting discouraged generally, looking over their shoulders about jobs. The place where she would meet most resolve was the mining industry, the NUM. He's just carried out the mandate, but he's carried it out very badly. They were looking for a dispute, but not now.

*Later perhaps?*

**Jack** Later. The dispute came too soon. And if the NUM were picking the time, the dispute might have come too late for them.

*You all see the NUM as being the cutting edge of the trade union movement, the toughest bastion if any government is to reduce the trade union movement to size?*

**George** Yes, at this stage of British politics. That is not to say that others are not as potentially powerful, under different circumstances. Now she's got a perspective for this dispute and how it's going to end with a total capitulation by the NUM. I don't see how that is possible. No matter how the strike finishes, the NUM will still be there. You can't smash it in that fashion, the NUM will still be there. We would not be as strong if we lost the dispute as if we won it, but we would still be there.

**Jack** I agree. The one thing they can't do is run a successful coal industry on their own. Now I believe the NCB did need somebody from outside, its perspective had been too narrow. But it didn't need somebody who had taken such a brutal attitude to workers, it was like waving a red rag to a bull.

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*MacGregor began as a right-wing radical, he called the mining industry a business, talked of taking the industry back into profitability, putting it in the free market. But in the last round of talks, he was stressing continuity with the past, it's going to be all like before, the colliery closures procedures are going to be the same. Do you think MacGregor and the Coal Board have shifted their position to try and get a compromise? The Government was worried that it was going too far. Did you have him on the run to some extent, maybe still have?*

**George** I don't think movement was intended, but he has had some sound advice to use different language, to be seen with a conciliatory tone. At the end of the day what he is suggesting is not an offer, he is simply saying there is a procedure there. Even with regard to the five pits he is talking about not closing, they were suggesting that they go back for discussion at local level with no guarantee about the outcome.

**Alan** The crucial thing they haven't done is say they are going to withdraw this whole approach of cutting back on capacity, of the intended closure of 20 pits and the rundown of manpower. While that remains we can't settle.

**Jack** The mistake he has made is not to safeguard what really is the ace in their pack and that was the review procedure. It was the best thing they had ever had. I mean it worked, it actually worked. The union went along with this procedure year in, year out, and it would have been very simple for the Coal Board to have done it again. I am not saying the union deliberately helped them to close pits but the procedures certainly give them an advantage that the union has never got over. It was a whitewash to give it respectability. And it gave the union the impression that it was fighting, that it had a chance to change things. But it was absolute nonsense. Now if I'd have been him, I would have safeguarded that, I'd have kept that going.

**Alan** That suggests the Government in effect had prepared for a strike and weren't too worried at the outset when the strike took place. Weren't they, in other words, aiming to give some kind of political statement to the country that they were able to take on the miners and impose a closure programme on them willy-nilly, openly and publicly rather than in the backdoor, surreptitious way that Jack has accurately characterised.

**George** I am not so sure about Jack's point when he said they didn't want a strike at this stage. I don't think they thought a strike was possible. But by the same token they were prepared to accept it if it in fact materialised. They felt sufficiently strong, with the stocks of coal they had and the power station permutation, with the oil stations lying idle and the nuclear stations not running to full capacity. They had it all sized up and were prepared to face it if it happened.

**Jack** I don't think they deliberately went out to make a strike. Like George says, they believed it wouldn't happen, and if it did well we've got coal as a backstop. It was very difficult for a strike to start, if you analyse how they begin in our industry. They believed that the NEC would go for a ballot, that there would be enough pressure to have ballots, and that the union would get itself in a different position.

**George** They certainly couldn't have foreseen in the course of this dispute sections of the union which in the past would certainly have been described as moderate areas of this union which have become, in this situation, some of the most solid areas during the course of the strike and in their activities, for example, Durham, Northumberland and Lancashire and indeed, they may well have visualised Scotland, Yorkshire, South Wales and Kent out on their own.

**Alan** Indeed that was part of the problem. We'd come out in 1981 and then there was a temporary pull back by the Government. We had had the various national ballots and we kept getting turned down. Then when in 1983 we made an attempt with Lewis Merthyr, it didn't come off, there was a ballot and that was it, the end of it. There was a strong feeling in South Wales that there was no way we were going to take any lead in the future on pit closures. Then when Yorkshire took off that was a strong argument that we'd better go now because if Yorkshire's going and we don't, then we are finished. Now while growing unemployment and the rundown of industry could and did have a negative effect, it also had a positive effect. It suggested to our men that if they didn't stand up and fight now they were all going to go, and so were the communities. So that the negative feature of the rundown of industry reacted back with miners and, together with the union giving a strong lead, led to a position where enough of us made up our minds to come out on strike. In South Wales only ten out of the 28 pits actually took a decision to come out on strike, the others in effect were picketed out, but without much difficulty. Only with one or two exceptions did we have to have mass picketing and that was only a matter of one or two days, the rest came out on strike when a handful of pickets went to their gates.

*How far has it been a problem for the union, and the conduct of the strike subsequently, that you came out in March, which has always been seen as a bad time, with the spring and summer coming?*

**Alan** It was raised as an argument at our lodge meeting but it didn't have much effect, it just got brushed aside. But in fact experience has shown that, with the kind of struggle we are in, it has been an advantage to come out in the summer. As far as the morale of our men is concerned, had we been out in the winter with no coal, no money to do things that they can do in the summer with fine weather, we might have had more difficulty in maintaining the morale that we have.

**George** I don't think we had a choice. The overtime ban on wages and pit closures had been going for 17 weeks. How could you keep an overtime ban going while they were proceeding to close pits? In my opinion, we had to change the level of action and decide whether or not to strike we didn't have a choice in that sense. It certainly made it a bit more difficult in the sense that it's the worst time for coal usage. If this strike had started, for argument's sake, at the end of last September and had gone through the winter period it might have had a more dramatic effect on the power stations, but it has been positive in the sense that the lads have actually enjoyed the strike. Because the weather has been so bloody splendid. But we didn't have a choice, it was either pack it in or make a stand.

**Jack** One of the surprising things was that it set off like a rocket. It took one shift in Yorkshire to bring every pit and unit out. Now without wishing to be parochial, in hindsight I don't think you could have started it anywhere else. I'm not suggesting our men are any more political, I'm talking purely about size and about man availability when it started. We were able on the afternoon of

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the first day to start dispatching reasonably large numbers of pickets outside Yorkshire. It got momentum from day one.

**George** The sheer size of Yorkshire is a very important fact in men's minds and to see Yorkshire moving, that had a big effect.

**Jack** I think it's fair to say that everyone in Scotland and Wales sees Yorkshire as a safe area as regards to jobs and that was important. They thought if Yorkshire was acting, so should they.

**George** An important feature of the strike, because it's lasted so long, has been the inter-coalfield movement, Yorkshire pickets all round the country, Scottish pickets, Welsh pickets, Durham pickets. Perhaps for the first time ever, through the dispute, we are building a national union of British mineworkers and losing some of the 'we're Scots miners, we're Durham miners'.

*George raised the question of the ballot. The ballot has always been, or has been seen to be, the weak point, why no national ballot? It's been brought up not only by the Right and the Government but also within the labour movement itself. Do you yourselves see the fact that no national ballot was held as a weakness, something that you have to counteract by action or propaganda, or is it something that you see as something you had to adopt because of the specific circumstances?*

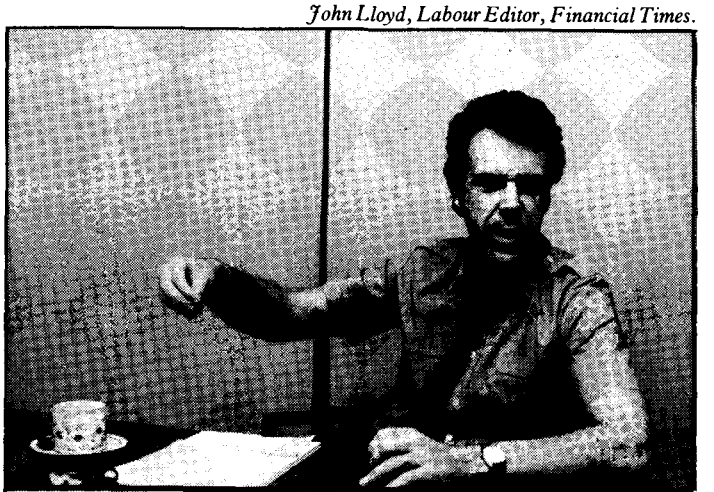
**Alan** In my opinion, if we had had a national ballot from cold, we could have lost it again, I've got to be honest. We had two or three national ballots and each of them we lost. In fact when South Wales was already out on strike over Lewis Merthyr, we lost the ballot, it didn't take off on a national scale as it did in March of this year with Yorkshire. And even in South Wales then, that is February 1983, our vote there was only 64% and we were out on strike at the time, although the rest of the British coalfield weren't. I think the tactic we adopted was correct, with the men themselves starting and developing the struggle, and wherever we actually discussed it, to take a show of hands and vote on it at meetings on the basis of long established democratic practices.

**Jack** The only ballot I can remember where we didn't have media involvement was the one in 1981 where we got 86% for action in Yorkshire. Very little interest was shown by the press in that ballot simply because we were making a commitment to the future, the members weren't being asked to come out on Monday or whenever. What they were saying was that we were going to fight to save our pits. Every miner in Yorkshire knew that, and so did the Board. We fought a hard campaign. And so when the miners took action over the closure, they knew that the union had made a commitment. One of the problems is that we've seen ballots as *the* democratic process. Now there is a lot of credit in that when you're talking about money. But that is not a democratic way of making a decision about closing pits. The man in Nottingham or Yorkshire has no right at all to vote on whether or not Scotland or Cumberland, or any other area's pits, are closed.

**George** The fact that there wasn't a national ballot in that sense has been a problem, because of the way that the Board, the Government and the media tend to raise this question, and working miners have used it too. But the fact is the strike started without a ballot at that stage. And while we could have held a ballot during the strike, what would that have achieved, it wouldn't have solved the problem, it wouldn't have stopped the pit closure programme. Therefore, in my view, the ballot was not

*Alan Baker, Secretary, Oakdale Lodge, NUM.*

*John Lloyd, Labour Editor, Financial Times.*



*Jack Taylor, President of Yorkshire miners.*

*George Bolton, Vice-President, Scottish NUM.*

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something worth considering. Not one single striking branch has ever asked for a ballot, it's only working miners and pits in Notts who have asked for a ballot. Quite frankly, I doubt whether, if you held a national ballot and won it, they would stop working.

Ballot votes are very important, we have more ballots than most in this union. They are a very, very important question in the trade union movement and in the minds of the British people. But you must avoid the danger of looking upon the ballot vote as the totality of democracy, because it's not. Democracy is something you have got to practice every day of your life. A ballot vote is very important but it depends upon the circumstances and Jack's right, no lad has got the right to close a pit in Scotland or Wales or Kent or elsewhere and put me on the scrapheap. But it has got to be said, it has given us that area of difficulty in the battle of ideas among the mass of British people. To them a ballot vote is historically – and rightly so – an important question. After all, we had to fight to get the right to vote in this country.

*But the specific problem is that you have got the Notts area, which from day one refused to join the strike. There have been striking Notts miners, there still are some, but it has become a focus of opposition to the NUM leadership and now of course it is the focus of legal cases which have spread into other areas, because the working miners there see themselves as fighting for a principle and spreading it through various means. Hasn't that been a continuing thorn in your side?*

**George** Well this is the difficult problem, if they had struck with us from the first week it would have affected the whole character of the dispute and it may well be it could have been ended by now, but then of course the reality is that that problem is with us.

*Is that something about the Notts miners?*

**George** Well I'm not so sure about that. They voted for strike action in 1972 and 1974. You can argue about the history of Spencerism but I'm not sure how relevant that is. I was talking to a Notts lad and he was arguing that part of their approach was that they didn't think that they could win anyway. They were conditioned just to accept that there would be pit closures and that's all there was to it. It may be that during the course of this dispute we haven't given enough thought to that question, maybe we still have to think about how to address those lads in Nottingham with more material, leaflets, getting access to the coalfields with not so much rallies but perhaps meetings in villages and try and win the concept, but that's only a personal opinion.

**Alan** It's a personal view I share. I think we made a big mistake going in there on a mass picketing basis early on, rather than going in there with meetings, leaflets and campaigning. I get the impression that the leadership in Nottingham, and I could be wrong, haven't over the recent period conducted a campaign of argumentation, of leafleting, of discussion at conferences on the threat to the coal mining industry as we have in South Wales, and I'm sure that's certainly been the case in Scotland and in Yorkshire. Because of that, the Notts miners as a whole haven't got the picture so clearly as the miners in various other parts of Britain. Now it's quite possible that if we had gone into the Notts coalfield and done that, we'd still have been unsuccessful. I think myself that it demands a much wider campaign, not only in the Notts coalfield but in Cheltenham, Ipswich, right throughout Britain. The ideas the NUM is fighting for need to be taken out on a very wide scale. After all these weeks, and the problems we have had with Notts and the steelworkers to a certain extent, we need to build a broader understanding now which will react back on them.

**Jack** I wouldn't be arrogant enough to say that we had done everything right, I don't think we have. But as we said before, you can't choose the time, and therefore you can't prepare, you're always taking industrial action on unprepared ground. Perhaps we should have recognised the problem in Notts before. As someone said to me, when you elect a Tory MP in a constituency that has 10 pits then we ought to have recognised that there could be a political problem. But I don't think we could have prepared like that, you have to make the best of what you've got at the time.

**George** But that will always apply to a certain extent to a trade union, the Board's got a command structure, the Government's got a command structure – we've not got that. We can't blow whistles and marshal troops. We wouldn't want to anyway. But that's always a problem. You are dealing with powerful adversaries.

**Alan** I agree we shouldn't have a command structure, but if on the other hand we also don't hold meetings and conferences to discuss the tactics and strategy of the strike, that's also a weakness, and I feel it has been a weakness in the whole NUM campaign.

**George** You can always argue that more could and should be done. In all disputes we must pay a lot of attention to regular discussion about what has been happening and the stage you're at, your strategy and your tactics. You made a point earlier about mass picketing. Well I'm not opposed to mass picketing. The mass pickets are a very important weapon in our armoury. What I would argue is that you must think very carefully when and how you use it. In Fife we had a very effective mass picket: every village was there, every bridge was a picket, every bush was a picket line and the school kids, grannies and grandads were out. As a consequence, the lorry drivers didn't want to know. But, for example, we had to accept at Ravenscraig that even with a mass picket, there was no possibility, on sheer logistics, of stopping the place. There are three or four gates into that plant and how do you mobilise 10,000 at each gate, that kind of thing just wasn't on. But that raises another very important question. If the only way you can stop a place like Ravenscraig is on the basis of a mass picket, you've got to question what that means in terms of the steelworkers themselves. It's an enforced form of support and therefore it is a very hollow form of support. It would certainly mean that unless you had a mass picket at Ravenscraig every day, every week, then you could not stop it. It's interesting, by the way, to look at the attitude of the Government. The Government and the Board have consistently tried to contain the argument to the question of mass pickets, violence and law and order; and they have avoided like the plague any discussion of what the dispute is all about. Their strategy has been to pin us down on the law and order question. That tells you that they have a real fear of a mass understanding by the British people of what the dispute is all about. And if that's true, then that certainly suggests that, however much we have done, then clearly more needs to be done by way of public activity around what this dispute is all about.

**Alan** I certainly don't want to give the impression that I am against picketing as such. I mean we had mass pickets at one or two of our collieries at the very beginning of the strike. Where it

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can be effective, OK. But the point is it can only be part of our approach.

**George** A very good example is Ken Livingstone and the GLC. He's winning his case because he's finding it possible to talk politically in a mass way, and demonstrating in practice that people are now backing him and not the Tory government. In a sense it's simpler to do that in London, where you are the GLC and you've got a lot of facilities, but everywhere you go, from Land's End to John O' Groats, there's strong evidence of support for the miners by way of food and money. If we can only find a bit more time and maybe some fresh ideas. I happen to think the question of culture and the arts is very important. We need to try and get the world of entertainment identified with us, not least because they get mass audiences.

**Alan** You are now raising another angle in the sense of the perspective of the strike and the ability to maintain it. I think this is a problem. When the talks were taking place there was a feeling of some hope, some light at the end of the tunnel. That vanished. Now, with the men and women that are involved, using their initiative, going out on the picket lines, collecting food, speaking to trade union and public meetings, there's no worry. They are totally involved and they are new people as a result of it. But we have also got a mass of miners who are, for whatever reason, not involved to that extent and, at this point in time, they are being held because of the negative or strong feeling of fear of what would happen if we did go back to work: the pits would shut, the Coal Board and the Government would walk over them and trample their agreements underfoot, coupled with a good deal of loyalty to the union. But we need to give them some kind of perspective, some light at the end of the tunnel. We have got to find some way of doing this. It's missing at the moment.

**Jack** It's not for me to criticise other areas, that is the last thing I would do, but we've had as many rallies and meetings as we can deal with. We've met our members, we've been in every pit village in Yorkshire for people to talk to us. The union has done its share of that, we've talked to the lads and the majority are supporting it. I can see now that we can have pop concerts and whatever but alongside that and your conferences, there is the picketing. If you're taking men off picket lines to go to conferences, you are weakening the resolve. One of the problems that we have had is a commitment to the men in Nottingham who aren't working and if the Yorkshire area in particular, because we are nearest to them, stopped going to Nottingham, there would be a feeling that we had let the men down. I think it's as wrong to say that we don't need mass picketing as it is to say that we do need them, because in a way it's a horses for courses job. Sometimes you are putting pickets in danger if you don't send a lot. If we are trying to stop coke going into Orgreave, you can't do that with a small picket line, because lorry drivers won't stop to talk to pickets, you have to have a mass picket, in order to put your case across. Now if you had a mass picket and it succeeded there were added things to gain from it – 1) stopping coke going into Orgreave, and 2) to give a boost to the lads on the picket line and that is important. I don't see how we can have set rules. We can be over-critical about what we have done, we have done a marvellous job up to now. We haven't always succeeded and perhaps we should re-look at what we are trying to do, but that is a task that ought to be done by the NEC really.

**George** On the question of picketing, we've got to appreciate that the state has learned a lot of lessons since 1972 and 1974. We have to recognise that you can't picket your way to victory. Picketing is extremely important, for example we've got small, very effective pickets in power stations, we've had some effective mass picketing. Picketing is a very important part of trade unionism and we should never give that up, but we've always got to think where, when and how. But now we have got to concentrate the mind on what lies ahead. The TUC is the most crucial date on the calendar. We can go to the TUC and get a decision on the miners' dispute. That's important. Even more important is what we are doing from now until the TUC in order to assure that there is nothing hollow about that decision for support. We have got to be galvanising trades councils, local shop stewards' committees, and so on. If we can get the TUC calling for a day of action, and we can pull it off, that could be quite decisive in winning this dispute. But that is a big task.

*Left to right: George Bolton and Jack Taylor.*

*Left to right: John Lloyd and Alan Baker.*

*The TUC will pass the miners' motion, there seems to be no question of that, but you are talking about the danger of that being hollow, rhetorical, you're looking for physical support afterwards?*

**George** That's right.

**Jack** The decision will do nothing for us if they are not able to carry it out.

**George** I would anticipate the possibility of the TUC calling for a day of action on behalf of the miners. But what you actually get from that would, in my view, be largely determined by what is done between now and the TUC.

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*So what do you want from the TUC?*

**Jack** I don't think we should make it into an everything sticks at the TUC because I'm not convinced that we shall get a decision, and the implementation of that decision.

*You think the physical support that has so far been delivered, and there has been a fair amount from the railwaymen, seamen and others, is about the limit?*

**Jack** There's some you can count on, there are some that will feel that going to the rostrum and pledging support is sufficient. But there are others who can go to the rostrum, pledge support and can't deliver the goods.

**George** But don't you think, Jack, there are a whole lot of possibilities. Let us take the health service workers, to whom the miners responded with a day of action. We have a credible case to approach them. Take the workers in Telecom, who have conducted a tremendous battle against privatisation, is there no connection there between our battle and their battle, should it not be possible to win them for a day of action concept? But to come to this question of the collecting. The money is vital to conduct the strike – no question – but it has got other importance as well, the fact you are giving cash is a tangible demonstration of support. It's part of this outgoing side.

**Alan** We are having expressions from people who are giving food, who are collecting it and organising the miners' support groups, that they feel that this is a way of changing the pattern of events since 1979 with the advent of the first government of Margaret Thatcher. The kind of impression that they have insiduously built up is that they are a juggernaut, a steamroller that rolls over every kind of opposition and this approach, to give a contribution, is giving them a feeling at last that they are doing something about this. For the first time they can begin to change that pattern of events, they have got some control over social events in the country. I think this kind of collecting is extremely important. In fact it is as important as picketing if we see it in that way, if we don't just see it as a question of purely and simply getting hold of a can of beans or a pound note. It's about involving the community in the politics of this strike, in the collecting and also in a deeper understanding that will react back on men and women working in industry and hopefully get them more prepared where they are involved in confronting pickets not to cross picket lines or whatever.

**Jack** You mean that after 21 weeks, 24 in some of our pits, that there are some people who are not attuned to what we need?

**Alan** There are a lot of miners who do not understand the case we are arguing. So while many people are giving food and money, I don't think the majority of the British people understand the strategy of the Government and the alternative we are putting forward. Take the question of nuclear power stations – the strategy of the Government is to run down coal-fired power stations and create a nuclear power station programme.

**Jack** That is a good example. In fact, it has not always been NUM policy to be anti-nuclear, and it has certainly not always been Labour Party policy, has it? Nor Communist Party policy for that matter. Now I am anti-nuclear and I agree totally that nuclear power will play an enormous part in the future of this union.

**George** What you are talking about really Alan is the miners finding alliances with the peace movement. I've mentioned Telecom privatisation, workers fighting against hospital closures and cutbacks in the health service, the GLC, the question of rate capping, you've got people concerned with democracy, the civil rights question, there's a tremendous possibility of a broad democratic alliance against the Tories, it's how you find the ways of tying all that together.

*Let me bring up one question you have touched on, the role of the women in this dispute. It has been a strong feature in every area. It's been remarkable to see communities involved, but also remarkable to see the emergence of groups like Women Against Pit Closures. Did you see that early on, did you encourage it or did it arise naturally?*

**Alan** There is still a problem, not with the women, but with the men, with the lodges. This has developed despite the NUM and the lodges rather than because of them. Although to the lodges' credit, they are at least working to a certain extent in an amicable way, encouraging and assisting the women. By and large the women are not going to take no for an answer anyway, and I think this springs from the experience of the Greenham Common women who have had a tremendous impact on the attitude of women, that they can go out and do things, whether or not the men want them to. Early on in this strike, they became encouraged to do exactly that, they felt the strength of the union and the actions of the NUM and the miners in developing the strike and it just took off. But it took off very much from some of the Greenham Common experience.

**Jack** We encourage the women's groups, they've certainly been a plus in the dispute. They have filled a role that was not going to be filled by the union. One of the things that we have not done in the union is to co-ordinate it in a proper and efficient way. While it gave a new dimension to the union, it could have given an even wider and more powerful dimension had we been on a better foundation to start with. What we did was encourage it, let it get going and then there were a lot of people within the union that then wanted to control it, and that was the wrong way to go about it. We should have had a more positive approach, we should have set it going, and not controlled it in that sense, but it did need guidance, though it needed to be part of itself rather than some in the union who wanted to guide the women. We should have brought them in and together we should have guided it. They have done a great job and we wouldn't have been in the position we are into today if we hadn't had the women's groups at our side.

**George** It certainly didn't happen from any well thought out conscious effort on the part of the NUM itself. Jack's right, without them there would have been trouble in the mining families. Beyond that, though, it has been invaluable in that it was a big plus for us in how the public saw the strike, women going to the picket line, it was a new dimension. And more is required to be done because of its longer term importance beyond this strike, it's a very important political development in the labour movement.

*How do you see the strike ending? Do you see it ending through negotiation, through the Coal Board finally producing an offer which is acceptable, or something more dramatic like the Government caving in as in 1974?*

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**Jack** All three of us should stand up and sing 'Here we go, here we go'. That should be suitably embarrassing for all of us! I find the answer very difficult because I tend to get it wrapped up in what I hope happens. Hopes very rarely get fulfilled for workers. I'm a great believer we should not start counting our chickens. We should continue with the battle and our priority must be success.

**George** We won't finish up by defeating the Government, that's for sure. My view is that it has got to finish on the basis that the Board withdraw the closure programme and we sit down and discuss a whole number of important questions. Now what will happen on the question of wages, four-day week, retirement at 55? All of these are issues which will be resolved during the course of discussions .

**Alan** I think if we get that, it will be a political defeat for the Government. Now, of course, we won't bring the Government down and we are bedevilled by these ultra-left groups who go round calling for exactly that, a general strike to bring the Government down. I am certain myself that the Government want to see the NUM defeated on this, totally defeated as a political plus for them, much the same as with the Falklands war. I did think at one time that if it was just a question of withdrawal of the list we would be back to 1981, but I don't think that is the case. Our primary objective is to get the withdrawal of this threat to close x number of pits. If we do that it is a political defeat for the Government.

**Jack** We certainly should not get in a position where we start sharing out the spoils until we have got some and there are some in our movement that are already wanting to distribute prizes. First of all we should establish a coal industry with a future that is expanding, that guarantees the future of the communities. That is first base.

**George** To force the Board to withdraw the closure programme would be a massive defeat for the Board and Government strategy, there is no question of that. They understand that, just as we understand it. Thatcher knows that if we win this dispute it is a massive defeat for her and her strategy and could be a massive boost to defeating them when the election takes place.

**Jack** If we get that, the biggest prize in this dispute will be gained by other workers because they will see and gain in confidence from what we achieve. It will be a step forward for the movement and that is the real reason why the movement should be saying this dispute is important to us.

**George** You come back to the question of the TUC and broadening the struggle. We should just note that NUR and ASLEF are moving into struggle fairly soon and that will involve industrial action and of course if that is allowed to escalate it's the same fight as for us, a fight for their jobs.

**Jack** And Sogat, and other unions. Take NUPE. It's in constant conflict because of low pay and cuts in the health service. It would be wrong for us to see this dispute as being the only thing wrong with our society, we could spend a week discussing that. But if we lose this one we shouldn't go along with the view that we will lose them all because I don't believe that. I mean take the health service. If we can't unite this nation round the health service there really is something the matter with it. □

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# WE NEED YOUR HELP!

Miners on strike and their families are enduring bitter and intense hardship, hunger and destitution. Nevertheless, they are determined to continue their fight to save their pits, jobs and communities. They will not be starved into submission. But – with the strike now in its fifth month – they need your help. We are appealing to you to give to the Miners' Solidarity Fund, and to go on giving regularly until this dispute is over.

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# UP *FRONT*

**Communists have supported the miners strike from day one. Because the strike is about saving mining jobs and communities and the regeneration of industry in Britain. And because it is about the wider issues of defending trade union and democratic rights and creating a safe clean energy supply.**

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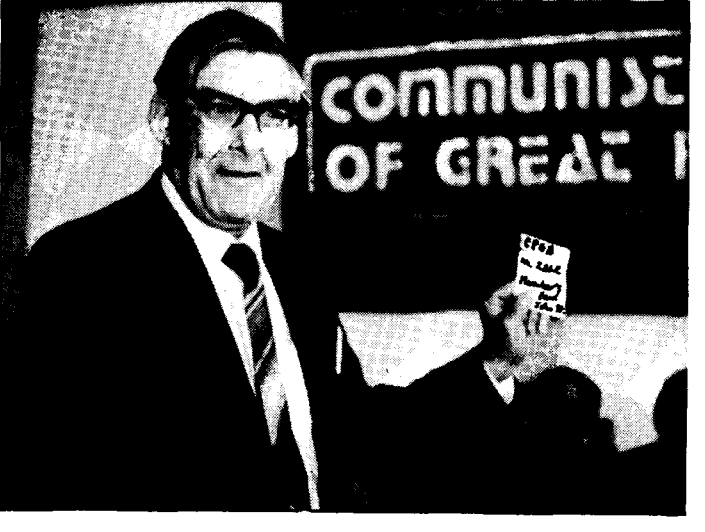
It was communist women and miners who first visited Greenham to build the links between the miners and the peace movement. Communist women have been active in 'Women against Pit Closures' and communist trade unionists have pushed for solidarity from other unions.

*Delegation to Greenham.*

Mark Williams, one of the miners from South Wales who have joined the Communist Party said "Communists have always had a good name in Maerdy Pit as people who are prepared to work their guts out for the miners – I wanted to help them".

*Steve Richards and Mark Williams, both miners who have just joined the Communist Party.*

Communist miners leader Mick McGahey holding out a Party Card – why not take it?

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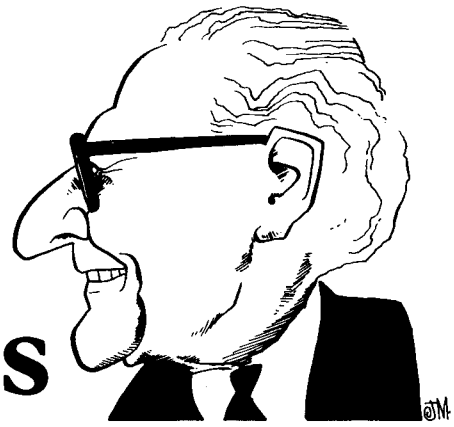
**Suddenly, relations between the two Germanies have become an issue of some controversy.**

# A Tale of Two Germanies



## Jonathan Steele

AT FIRST SIGHT the Soviet Government's manifest concern over the projected visit by Erich Honecker, the East German party leader to West Germany seems odd. The two German states have long had a special trading relationship. Unlike every other Eastern European economy, the German Democratic Republic has for more than 25 years been able to export goods to the Federal Republic free of tariffs, under a special Common Market arrangement. As for Western investment in the GDR economy, the East German party leadership has shown no major inhibitions. Companies such as Siemens and Krupp, whose names recur continually in the list of Hitler's big-business collaborators that every GDR schoolchild learns, operate favourably in East Germany. Volkswagen is shortly to open a new assembly plant — selected by the GDR over other Western European competitors.

Politically, the two states have kept up a dialogue throughout the downturn of US-Soviet relations. At the end of 1981 Chancellor Schmidt visited East Germany. Since his replacement by the Conservative Christian Democratic Union leader, Helmut Kohl, the dialogue has remained unaffected. The ultra-right-wing Bavarian Premier, Franz-Josef Strauss, and the Mayor of West Berlin have both visited the GDR for the first time.

What then has prompted Soviet concern? Is it that the accumulation of symbols of a close German-German relationship has now reached a point where the Soviet Politburo feels enough is enough? Has it changed its mind over the value of the intra-German dialogue? Or does it believe that the overall climate of East-West acrimony has now turned so sour that a visit by Mr Honecker to the Federal Republic would look like an anomaly, or even an assertion of independence against the Soviet Union?

All of these possible explanations appear to be involved in what is undoubtedly a gradual shift of position in Moscow. Originally President Chernenko is assumed to have agreed to Mr Honecker's visit to West Germany when the two men met in June during the summit meeting of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance. Since then the Soviet government appears to have had second thoughts.

### West German attitudes

The deciding factor seems to be the way the forthcoming visit has been treated in Bonn by both the Federal Government of Chancellor Kohl and the West German mass media. Firstly, the Kohl administration is using the visit to argue that nothing has changed in intra-German relations since the deployment of the first American Pershing-II missiles in West Germany last year. Throughout the run-up to the missile deployments the Soviet government warned that things would not be the same politically if the Pershings arrived. Militarily, they argued, the Pershings would not give NATO the nuclear advantages it claimed, since the Warsaw Pact would reply with its own counter-measures — as indeed it has done with the deployment of medium-range rockets in the GDR and Czechoslovakia. But politically the climate would be bound to worsen, as Germans faced each other across what the late President Andropov called 'a palisade of rockets'. Now Bonn is arguing that Mr Honecker's visit shows that the Soviet line was wrong.

On this point at least there is some evidence that Mr Honecker takes a different line from Moscow. Before the missile deployments he told Chancellor Schmidt that 'good neighbourliness cannot flourish in the shadow of US missiles.' But a statement put out by the GDR's Socialist Unity Party central committee recently said that 'now more than ever' every avenue for negotiations between East and West had to be used.

A second point in Bonn's treatment of the projected Honecker visit which annoys Moscow is the way that subtle differences in view within the Warsaw Pact are being highlighted as 'splits'. Mr Honecker is being praised in West Germany for showing himself independent of Moscow, and for 'defying the Kremlin' because the party paper *Neues Deutschland* has not reprinted all of Pravda's recent comments on the issue.

Thirdly, Chancellor Kohl has offended Moscow by making public the trade-off in human rights concessions — some relaxation of travel restrictions for people moving in and out of the GDR — in return for a £250 million loan from West Germany. This kind of exchange is not new in German-German relations, and the Soviet government itself accepted it when it agreed with Dr Kissinger to permit more Soviet Jews to emigrate in return for most-favoured-nation treatement in trade. What angers the Soviet government is the explicit way it is being advertised in Bonn.

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### GDR's stability

The Soviet Union has always been wary of any suggestion that the West is trying to split the Warsaw Pact. Most recently it has had the experience in Poland where the Reagan administration has used economic sanctions to obtain human rights concessions, the latest being the release of most of the Solidarity union activists as well as the leaders of the Workers' Defence Committee (KOR). The Soviet government is not willing to allow another of its allies to be cast in a similar public mode as economically beholden to the West. Hence its direct warnings to Chancellor Kohl not to think he can try to put pressure on the GDR, which of course are indirect warnings to Mr Honecker not to fall into a West German trap.

Ever since 1945 the Soviet government has been worried about the GDR's stability. It has always feared that the West was trying to undermine Communist Party rule in the GDR, and its fears were never groundless. For more than 25 years the West refused to recognise the GDR as a sovereign state in the hope that by denying it international legitimacy it would also deny it internal stability. With the advent of a Social-Democratic Party government in Bonn under Willy Brandt in 1969, West German government policy changed. Now the theory was what was known as *Wandel durch Annaeherung* ie 'change through rapprochement' or — put more crudely — killing East Germany by kindness. Of course there was no immediate expectation of that goal, and in the meantime Bonn was prepared to grant the GDR recognition at last. The two states signed a treaty in 1972.

> the Soviet government appears to have had second thoughts

### Not even speculation

Not every West German SPD politician was as cynical or malevolent as the notion of 'killing by kindness' implies. For many, it was enough that the two German states should build a network of neighbourliness. This could improve contacts between divided families, and pave the way for more trade. It might also produce some sort of gradual 'liberalisation' of party rule over time, and keep alive the notion of eventual reunification in the next generation.

What worries the Soviet government about Mr Kohl's policy is that the CDU has less respect for GDR sovereignty than the SPD governments of Brandt and Schmidt had. Mr Kohl talks more openly about reunification, and the 'provisional' nature of the present German borders. He appointed to the key post of Minister for Inter-German Relations Heinrich Windelen, a leader of one of the associations of Germans expelled from Eastern Europe at the end of the war. Although the Kohl government denies any 'revanchist' intentions, its policy looks deeply suspicious to Moscow.

At the same time the Soviet government is concerned by the growing sentiment on the West German Left, and among the Greens and the peace movement, which questions the division of Europe agreed at Yalta in 1945. The Soviet government reacted angrily to the European Nuclear Disarmament convention in West Berlin last year when some delegates tried to raise 'the German question'.

No-one could seriously suggest that Mr Honecker is in any way a neutralist or wishes to abandon the GDR's sovereignty in favour of reunification on Mr Kohl's terms. But in its present mood of general anxiety about Western intentions, the Soviet government wants to show that even such speculation is frowned on. □


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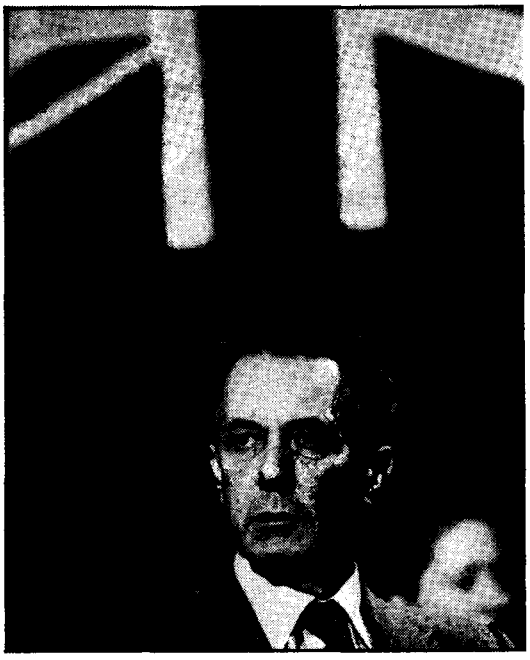
**The Right has suffered major defeats in its attempt to roll back comprehensives and return to a selective system. But the Tory offensive now unfolding aims to restructure education on the basis of the present system.**

# Breaking School Rules

Brian Simon



*Sir Keith Joseph, Secretary of State.*

IN THE SPRING of this year, the Government sustained a resounding defeat in the field of education. The events here were quite unusual and, to many, unexpected. It may be worth rehearsing these briefly at the start, since these set the scene against which an increasingly dirigiste policy is clearly emerging in an energetic attempt to strengthen centralised control over the shape, content and character of the educational system as a whole, as a crucial aspect of Thatcherite social policy.

## A DEFEAT FOR THE GOVERNMENT

The defeat occurred in the field of comprehensive secondary education. For many years in the mid-late 70s and early 80s, comprehensive schools (and their teachers) had come under sustained media attack, both in the popular press and TV. Yet (and this may appear contradictory) precisely while this was going on more and more schools were being transformed as comprehensives, so that the latest (1983) figures show that 90% of all students of secondary school age in the maintained sector in England are in these schools; 95% in Wales, and nearly 100% in Scotland.

These schools have been operating in particularly difficult circumstances over the last ten years, particularly in urban areas. Drastically falling rolls have compelled further reorganisation; mass youth unemployment creates all sorts of problems relating particularly to motivation for both students and teachers; official (ministerial) denigration of the work of the schools has been persistent and depressing. There have been, of course, other factors as well – severe cut-backs in educational expenditure; the position as regards teachers' pay. It may be that these factors encouraged the new government inspired initiative last autumn to strike at the roots of the comprehensive system and make a serious attempt to turn the clock right back.

A public opinion poll reported last autumn seemed to indicate that a majority of those questioned supported the selective grammar/modern school set-up in preference to comprehensives. This was given very wide publicity, as was to be expected of any news critical of comprehensive education. The outcome was predictable. Some 60 Tory MPs, seeing perhaps electoral advantage, signed a parliamentary motion favouring return to selective education. In addition, one of the ministers at the Department of Education and Science (Robert Dunn), now made a series of weekend speeches advocating a return to grammar schools.

Solihull was among a number of Tory controlled local authorities which leapt on the bandwagon, proposing the transformation of two successful comprehensives into grammar schools. The fact that all the other schools would, in effect, be downgraded as secondary moderns was not mentioned. What immediately became clear was that those in control had totally failed to evaluate the feeling among the local population in support of their schools. There was a massive outcry – large meetings took place at which enormous majorities voted clearly against the council's proposals; in particular very effective joint activity by parents (who set up a defence association) and teachers' associations, especially the NUT, was a feature of the campaign.

In the face of this opposition, the original scheme was withdrawn, but, in an attempt to save face, a second scheme was then officially presented, now proposing that one school only should be so transformed. But this again met with a further massive outcry, together with a very effective campaign launched by the local NUT association in cooperation with parents and the local communities. So this scheme also had to be abandoned.

### Other attempts

Solihull had opted, and in a very clear manner, to retain its comprehensives, and now no more is heard of the original project. Targets have been lowered to supporting differentiation within schools, an issue to which I will return. But here was a clear and precise public test as to the degree of support that exists for local comprehensive systems – the first on this scale. Whatever people may say to public opinion pollsters, whose questions relate to abstract issues and are carefully worded, when the matter comes down to earth in an attempt to destroy local systems, comprehensive education, it seems, can call on a really massive degree of support. This is the lesson from the Solihull adventure.

But recent developments have gone further than this. The concurrent attempts in Berkshire and Wiltshire to extend existing selective procedures met with an

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equally unyielding opposition from local populations, again involving mass meetings and consistent pressure on Tory councillors. In both cases local populations have opted to retain non-selective procedures and, in effect, to defend existing comprehensive schools and systems. The issue at Redbridge is still in dispute as I write, but here also an overt attempt to turn back the clock and reintroduce (or extend) selective schooling has again met with a public outcry, and a clear rejection by the majority of the people living in this area.

Evidently, then, those who set out to disrupt and, in effect, to sabotage existing comprehensive systems, have been forced to retire with bloody noses. Comprehensive education has defeated a concerted and powerful challenge to its popularity and emerged with flying colours. Those who support, and those who teach in these schools cannot fail to take heart from these developments which have transformed the scene over the winter and early spring this year, and certainly put a stop to further adventurist policies of this order.

**In the spring of this year, the Government sustained a resounding defeat in the field of education.**

## ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE COMPREHENSIVE SYSTEM

It may be worth asking why this recent attack failed so completely and so dismally, and why support for comprehensive systems, in spite of the very real problems mentioned earlier, is building up in this way? The fact is that the mass of these schools are working well – or as well as can be expected given the severe cut-backs they are experiencing.

Examination results are admittedly a narrow criterion, and open to considerable criticism from many points of view. But these are often appealed to by those who claim that comprehensive education leads to a decline in 'standards'. What is the position here?

Comparing the position in 1981-82 to that eleven years earlier (1970-71, when less than half of secondary students were in comprehensive schools in England compared to about 90% in 1981-82) we find that: [1]

1 The percentage of the age cohort gaining five or more O levels GCE (or their equivalent) – often used as the basic measure as regards trends in standards – has increased by over 30% (from 7.1% to 9.4%).
2 The percentage gaining from 1 to 4 O levels GCE (or their equivalent) has increased by over 50% (from 16.8% to 25.6%)
3 The percentage gaining one or more grades D/E O levels or CSE grades 2 to 5 has increased by over 300% (from 9.8% to 31.27%).
4 Conversely, the percentage gaining no passes at whatever level in GCE or CSE has dramatically declined – from 44% in 1970-71 (or almost half) to 12.9% eleven years later.

At this point what is worth stressing is the very positive achievements of the schools over what has been a very difficult and in many ways demoralising period. The credit for this must go to the schools – to the students themselves and above all to the teachers whose achievement it is. This success is also reflected in A level results, which have improved by 7% over the period examined, so that now 17. 7% of school leavers gain one or more A levels GCE.

### The gains

In the light of this overall achievement, investigations such as those conducted by Cox and Marks,[2] which purport to show the superiority of the selective over the non-selective set-up in examination results, seem supremely irrelevant (quite apart from their flawed research procedures), and certainly not worth the enormous publicity the mass media afforded them. Indeed it was, no doubt, partly the publication of these statistics, which coincided with the debacle at Solihull (and elsewhere), that may have drawn from the Secretary of State, Sir Keith Joseph, a first, if still grudging, word of appreciation of the teachers in the nation's schools. 'Our schools', said Sir Keith, 'are offering more pupils a broader education and a larger proportion of pupils are successful in examination at 16 plus'.[3] Not much of an accolade, perhaps, but at least an admission that education was no longer seen, in government circles, as a 'disaster', as Thatcher is reported as characterising it some months ago.

## JOSEPH'S STRATEGY FOR CENTRALISED CONTROL

It may be that the very success of comprehensive secondary schooling – as opposed to the myth of its 'failure' – has contributed to accelerating the clear and energetic thrust of both the present government and DES officials to greatly enhanced central control. Comprehensive secondary education by its very form and structure, is potentially a great deal more open-ended than the functionally designed school system of the past to which, it is now clear, there can be no return. It is not only that a whole series of actions (and statements) by Keith Joseph reflect this new centralist thrust (particularly *vis-a-vis* the local authorities and teachers); it is also that there are clear indications of a firm resolve, on the part of high DES officials, to gain a tight control over schools and local school systems with the object of bringing about a basic restructuring of education and so ensure that things do not get out of hand in terms of the preservation of the *status quo* and particularly of ensuring social stability.

On this latter issue, a recent study based on research casts an unusually revealing light on the thinking of senior officials at the DES – relating, in this case, to new policies seeking to impose sharp forms of differentiation on students at and before the age of 16, both within comprehensive schools and the system of further education.[4] The determination to achieve fully centralised power and control comes across very clearly. A senior DES official is, for instance, quoted as insisting that:

> 'There is a need especially in the 16-19 area, for a centrally formulated approach to education: we need what the Germans call 'instrumenterium' through which Ministers can implement and operate policy.'[5]

Further statements by DES officials relate to the current attempt to restructure the curriculum within the school system as a whole, on lines which will be referred to below. As one official is quoted as saying:

> 'Our focus must be on the strategic questions of the content, shape and purpose of the whole educational system and absolutely central to that is the curriculum. *We would like legislative powers over the curriculum* and the powers to control the exam system by ending all those independent charters of the examination bodies.'[6] (my itals, BS)

### Social engineering

The argument for centralising powers is based on the need for explicit social engineering to cope with the dangers arising from over-education in a contracting labour market. 'There has to be selection', another (anonymous) official is quoted as saying, 'because we are beginning to create

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aspirations which society cannot match'. There follows an interesting admission:

> '*In some ways this points to the success of education in contrast to the public mythology which has been created.* When young people drop off the education production line and cannot find work at all, or work which meets their abilities and expectations, then we are only creating frustration with perhaps disturbing social consequences. We have to select: to ration the educational opportunities so that society can cope with the output of education'. [7] (my itals, BS)

The arrogation of centralised powers, in defiance of traditional 'partnership' systems, has a clear social purpose:

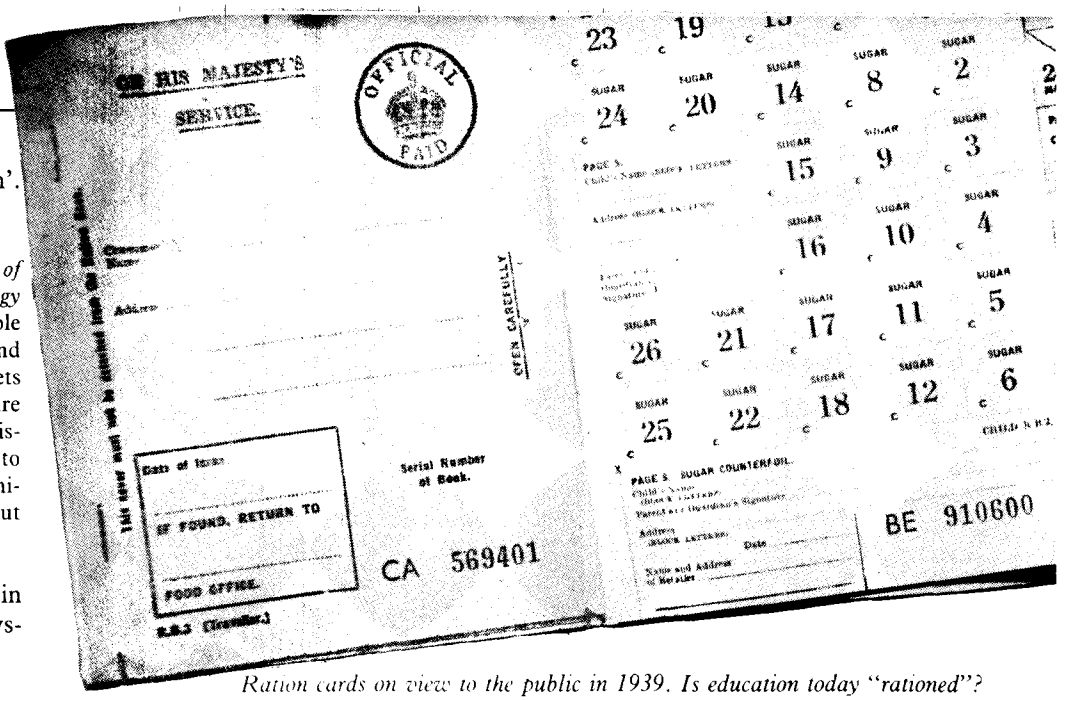
> 'We are in a period of considerable social change. There may be social unrest, but we can cope with the Toxteth's. But if we have a highly educated and idle population we may possibly anticipate more serious social conflict. *People must be educated once more to know their place.*' [8]

The conclusion the author of the study (Stewart Ranson) derives from this (and other) evidence is this, that 'the state is developing modes of control in education which permit closer scrutiny and direction of the social order'. [9]

This, of course, is no new thing in the history of education; indeed involvement by the state in the restructuring and control of education for social/political purposes has been apparent at least from the middle of the last century and earlier. What is new are the modes of control now being developed and brought into play. Significantly, the state, instead of working through and with other social organisations (specifically local authorities and teachers' organisations) is now very clearly seeking a more direct and unitary system of control than has ever been thought politic – or even politically possible – in the past. It is this that requires attention.

**Towards a differentiated system**

However one assesses the move to comprehensive education, one thing is clear. The unified, single school, accompanied by a definite swing towards a common curriculum and the decline, or at least modification, of rigid forms of streaming, has opened up educational opportunities in a new, and perhaps unpredictable way. The Left – communists, socialists, radical educationists and teachers, sometimes aided by Labour controlled authorities – has fought tenaciously for many years specifically against the introduction of divisive procedures within these schools.




*Ration cards on view to the public in 1939. Is education today "rationed"?*

As this battle was proceeding within the schools, world economic recession plus Thatcher government deindustrialisation policies resulted in a sharp contraction of employment possibilities for young people. The thinking of the DES officials, just quoted, reflects a vivid realisation of the contradiction between the skills, abilities and aspiratons of young people as developed through home and school, and the actual perspectives offered by the present system. The solution, in their view, is the deliberate restructuring of the system embodying processes of continuous differentiation and selection, with each level in the age cohort assimilated to acceptance of its fore-ordained lot both on the labour market and in the social order.

This policy requires that early differentiation between groups of pupils or students be embodied in differentiated curricula (or courses) leading to differentiated objectives – the whole package culminating in a set of carefully designed examinations (or other forms of 'assessment') which set the seal on the structure as a whole.

The present government's policies point clearly in this direction and have done during their five years of office. First, the parental choice clauses of the 1980 Education Act were designed, through forcing schools to compete with each other for students on the market, to lead to the enhancement of differentiation *within comprehensive systems*. Favoured schools, with good exam results flourish, while less favoured schools, inevitably with less good results, tend to lose their students, become unviable as schools, and face closure. Alert local authorities, assisted by alert teachers, can and have succeeded in countering these developments, which are assisted by falling school rolls. But the objective is clearly to introduce and firm up a basic division between schools within comprehensive systems. This is one form of differentiation; though one should here recall the major division still existing between the private system (encouraged and supported by the government) and the maintained system as a whole, as a further, and perhaps more basic differentiation.

**Reforming examinations**

But of course it is *within* individual comprehensive schools that children must be subjected to different educational routines and procedures having widely differing objectives. Queried by Brian Walden on ITV about the events at Solihull and elsewhere, Keith Joseph stressed this very precisely. 'If it be so, as it is, that selection between schools is largely out', he said, apparently realistically accepting defeat on this issue, 'then I emphasise that *there must be differentiation within schools*'. [10] This is a clear statement of the tactic to negate the move towards the unification of secondary education – the main objective of the comprehensive reform – and substitute, within the single school, the restructured system the DES officials, quoted earlier, have in mind.

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1 DES *Statistical Bulletin* 2/84 Feb 1984.
2 Marks, Cox and Pomian-Srzednicki *Standards in English Schools* (NCES 1983).
3 *Times Educ Supp* 13 January 1984.
4 Stewart Ranson 'Towards a Tertiary Tripartism: New Codes of Social Control and the 17+' in Patricia Broadfoot ed *Selection, Certification and Control* The Falmer Press 1984.
5 *Ibid* 238.
6 *Ibid* 224.
7 *Ibid* 241.
8 *Ibid.*
9 *Ibid.*
10 *Times Educ Supp* 17 February 1984.

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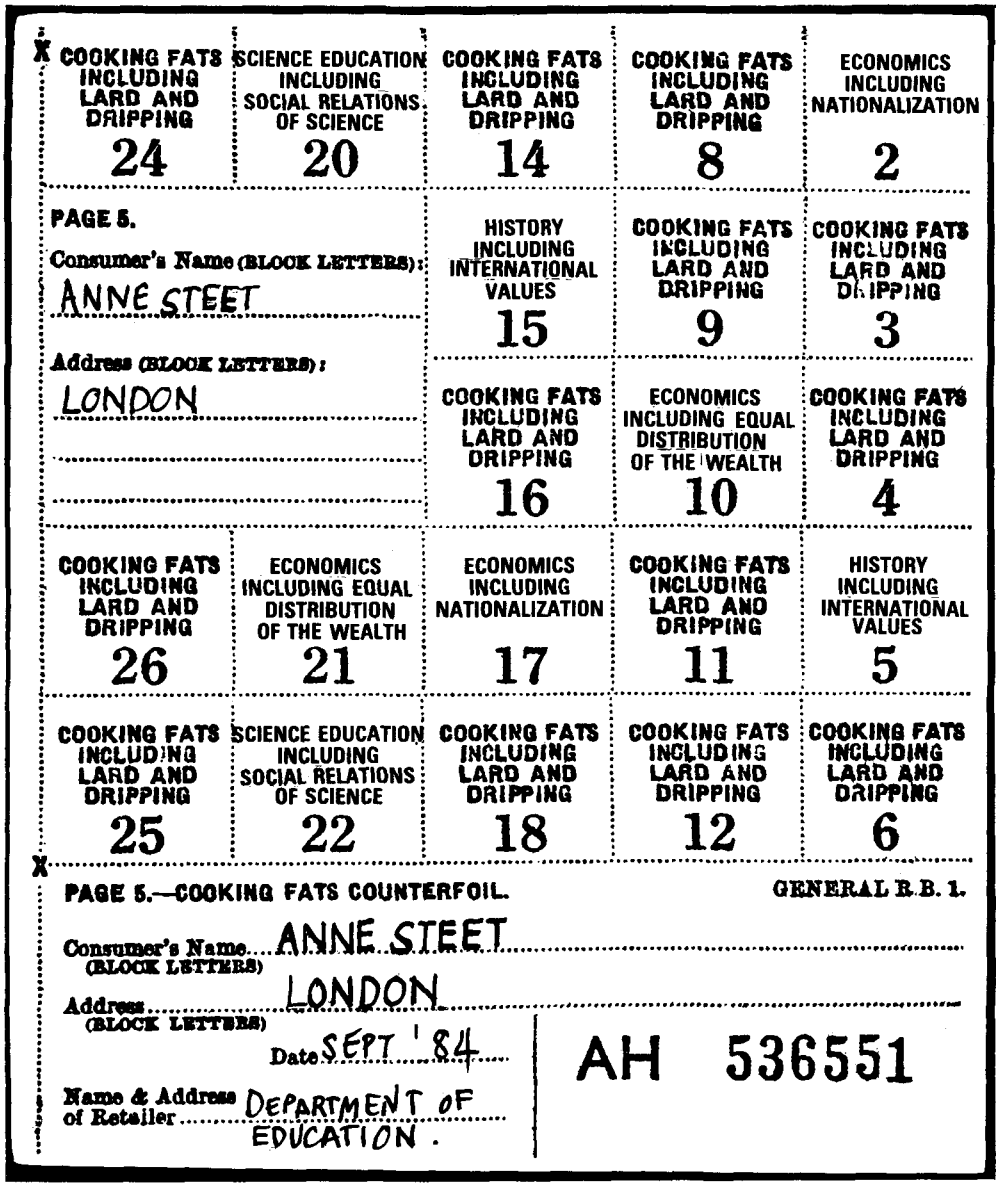

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Address (BLOCK LETTERS) LONDON

Date SEPT '84

Name & Address of Retailer DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION.

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What are the lineaments of that 'ideal' system which will ensure that each are 'educated once more to know their place'? It is clear enough and here Keith Joseph's decisions about the 'single' exam at 16 plus are crucial.

For fifteen or more years, comprehensive school teachers and many others have fought a long battle for the fusion of GCE O level (originally designed for the grammar schools) with the Certificate of Secondary Education (CSE), brought in in 1963 for secondary modern school pupils. The objective was the creation of a single exam which could provide an attainable perspective for *all* students and which would therefore obviate the need to differentiate between students for the two exams (and those not offered any exam) at the age of 13 or 14. Succeeding Secretaries of State, both Tory and Labour, have consistently delayed implementation of this though support for the single exam escalated greatly during the 70s and early 80s. A final set of decisions on this was announced by Joseph late in June this year (21 June, 1984)

What has happened is that this originally radical reform (in conception) has been turned into its opposite, and developed into a clear and precise instrument for social engineering under central, or state bureaucracy, control. First, it is quite clear that this will not be a single exam at all, nor anything like it. Instead it will be a system embodying differentiation and grading of Byzantine complexity. The new General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE), Joseph announced, '*will be a system of examinations*, not a single examination'.[1] There will be 'differentiated papers and questions in every subject'. The present (university dominated) GCE boards are to be retained and made responsible for examining the top grades, A to C. These 'will be clearly distinguished from grades D to G' (there are to be seven grades in each subject). These lower grades will be the responsibility of the present CSE boards. Thus a clear and sharp differentiation between those candidates entering for the higher grades and those entering for the lower is built into the system as a whole.

### The new streams

Further, the measure proposed embodies a clear bid for centralised control not only over the curriculum in general, but over each of its differentiated levels. This is achieved by the definition of 'national criteria' covering examinations in every subject. These 'criteria' are designed as 'instruments' by which control is shifted to the centre, since the Secretary of State must approve them.

Nor is it only a question of *general* criteria governing overall examining (and therefore teaching) objectives. In addition there are to be 'grade-related criteria' which, Joseph announced, 'will specify the knowledge, understanding and skills expected for the award of particular grades'. This implies that for each and every subject, seven sets of 'grade-related criteria' are to be established, in the attempt to define precisely what should be taught (or rather, learned) at *each* level. This surely implies the imposition of a differentiated system *par excellence*.

These decisions make it quite clear that the winnowing out of an elite will remain a primary function of comprehensive schools; the strongly guarded route through GCE O and A levels to the universities, higher education generally and the professions is to be retained and probably made even more selective.

This, then, is envisaged as one differentiated 'stream' within comprehensive schools. But the second route, now being erected, is perhaps the most significant in terms of government plans for restructuring. This is the technical/vocational route whose lineaments are not yet entirely clear, though becoming clearer. The way this route is being imposed on the schools contains new features characteristic of the more radical aspects of Thatcherism, involving the use of new state organisations or bureaucracies to act decisively and with speed against traditional procedures and the existing traditional state apparatus (the DES).

### Technical/vocational education

This is the use of the Manpower Services Commission, headed by Thatcher's friend, David Young, with its generous source of funds, to initiate the Technical and Vocational Education Initiative (TVEI). Local authorities and schools, starved of resources, were offered addi-

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tional cash for the specific purpose of providing new technical and vocational courses for named groups of students aged 14 to 18. £15 million of 'extra' money was allotted for this purpose in 1982-83, and the whole scheme has expanded greatly this year, a majority of local authorities now being involved, though many Labour authorities have refused to participate.

Such courses will be provided with a terminal examination, the so-called '17 plus' (Certificate of Pre-Vocational Education), announced by Keith Joseph a year or two ago – to take the place of the Certificate of Extended Education (CEE) supported by teachers and the (now defunct) Schools Council, but regarded by DES officials as too broad, or 'liberal', in its scope. The politics of this whole development are extremely complex, but the outcome is that a clear technical/vocational stream is being established alongside the academic stream within comprehensive schools. Indeed it is likely that the intention is that this stream should be divided into a higher and lower level, the majority focussing on more strictly vocational activities in the latter. New techniques of assessment (involving 'profiling', which has ominous implications from the social control angle) are likely to be used here.

Finally, for what Keith Joseph likes to call 'the bottom 40%' plans are still unclear. But in January, in a well-publicised speech at Sheffield to local authorities, Joseph developed ideas for short-term, 'criterion referenced' testing as a means of motivating and holding the interest of this large group of students, whose very real educational needs seem otherwise disregarded. Even the helots must be literate.

**Redesigning the curriculum**

In the course of attempting to carry through a drastic restructuring of this kind, Keith Joseph has attempted to exert his authority, as Secretary of State, on the system as a whole, utilising in particular his powers of control and decision over examinations. Joseph's interventions in this sphere have been characteristic of his personal approach and ideology; but several of these interventions have been strongly resented since they appear to involve interference in the curriculum which has certainly not normally been within the Secretary of State's responsibilities.

However, basing himself on his powers over examinations and their criteria, Joseph has specifically refused to allow questions relating to the social functions and relations of science to be included in exam criteria for science (leading to strong protests from the prestigious Association of Science Education); given his view as to what aspects of history should be studied (emphasising the need for a focus on national and patriotic values), and in various other ways made his preferences very clear. Other government members have ridiculed the growing move for peace studies in the schools, and so on. Perhaps such statements and decisions are straws in the wind, indicating the intention of exerting a firmer direct control over the curriculum from the centre than has been attempted for a very long time – including a clear ideological (and Thatcherite) component.

As I write, the DES (or rather Keith Joseph) is about to issue a comprehensive statement on the curriculum, the result of a long-prepared measure arising from the demand for reports on the curriculum from all local authorities. This, Joseph is reported as saying (in June), is likely to 'provide fierce disagreements' and will no doubt take the centralising measures one step further. Such dirigiste initiatives are, of course, in line with the powerful onslaught against university autonomy,

> The fact is that the mass of these schools are working well.

their curricula (in the case of the Open University) and their financial position, the immediate manifestation of which is the determination to transform existing conditions relating to academic tenure, where legislation is now threatened. 'The present government seems hell-bent on centralisation', commented the *Times Higher Education Supplement* in a major leader in June. 'No previous government has so successfully aggrandised the power of the state while simultaneously and loudly proclaiming its deepest wish to roll back its frontiers'.[12]

## TRANSFORMING THE EDUCATIONAL BALANCE OF POWER

A main characteristic of the recent period has been a quite fundamental change in the balance of power between those organisations concerned with education. Traditionally, this has been conceived as a 'partnership' between the state on the one hand, local authorities and the main teachers organisations on the other. This 'partnership' has been deliberately and progressively disrupted over the recent period, a process hastened since the Thatcher government took office in 1979.

First, there has been a concerted attempt to ignore, downgrade and progressively to devalue the role of teacher organisations in determining policy – specifically in terms of the curriculum, but in other fields as well. This reached its culmination with the summary abolition of the Schools Council by Keith Joseph two years ago. There is not space to go into the history and significance of all this here, but the action, and its results, were characteristic of the present government's arbitrary and undemocratic style. The Schools Council, on which teachers organisations were fully represented (and others of course), was allotted responsibility for examinations policy, and given the brief of researching and advising on the curriculum, in the mid-60s. It carried out this brief for nearly two decades. The primacy of the teaching profession on the Council was, however, clearly resented by the DES in particular. Two or three years ago, Joseph appointed a committee of one (Treneman) to investigate the Council and report. This report, though critical, was favourable, and supported its continuance.

A few months later Joseph announced the summary abolition of the Schools Council; its replacement by two quangos consisting largely of his own nominees; one to oversee examinations, the other the curriculum. The NUT has refused to cooperate with either of these organisations (or rather, refused to submit lists of possible members from which Joseph would make his nomination). Neither of these organisations has as yet made any serious impact on the educational scene but the main objective has been achieved – that of cutting teachers down to size and, symbolically, explicitly rejecting their primary responsibility for the curriculum; ie, what goes on in schools.

**Downgrading local authorities**

Second, by various means, some very harsh, local authorities have also been down-graded and, as we have seen in the rate-capping bill and in other ways, severely weakened *vis-à-vis* the central government (the intention of abolishing the GLC and other metropolitan boroughs is symptomatic). There is now no organisation equivalent to the Association of Education Committees which in the past (particularly the 1920s and 30s), courageously defied

[11] For this and succeeding quotations on the proposed GCSE *The Times* 21 June 1984.

[12] *Times Higher Educ Supp* 8 June 1984.

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the government when necessary and fought its policy proposals with energy and often with success. Local authorities, especially since reorganisation following the 1972 Act, no longer speak with a united voice in the area of education, and this has left the field open for central government or state initiatives to achieve primacy. The Green Paper of May this year which argues for a parental majority on school governing bodies[13] and, if implemented, will create a mass of local parental elites with quite extensive powers, is only the latest in a long line of actions having the intention of reducing the powers of local authorities and confusing the issue with the clear objective of further strengthening state initiatives.

There is, of course, always the possibility of resistance in this area. Indeed, as I write, Labour councils have agreed to defy the government over rate-capping. Equally important, now for the first time both the Tory controlled Association of County Councils and the Labour controlled Association of Municipal Authorities are united in an outright confrontation with the government specifically over education. The issue is the highly 'radical' government decision to divert rate support grant money covering a high proportion of the cost of further education courses and colleges from the authorities directly to the Manpower Services Commission, announced in the recent White Paper *Training for Jobs* (February 1984).

This would effectively remove control over a substantial sector of further education from local authorities and hand it to the MSC so that, as the *Times Educational Supplement* put it recently, 'it can specify what colleges do'.[14] Both local government associations have expressed their total opposition to this move and threaten to refuse to operate it. Both are demanding that the Government's intention to divert the money be rescinded. There could hardly have been a more direct – some would say foolhardy – challenge to local authorities than this; an action which again brings out very clearly the lengths to which the present government is prepared to go to achieve new centralised powers. Over recent years, local authorities have tended to abdicate from their traditional stance in defence of education. Hopefully this new, direct challenge may lay the basis for a more energetic policy in the future.

## AN ALTERNATIVE PATH

Two issues remain. First, how should the significance of these developments be assessed, and second, what should be the response of the left progressive forces and the labour movement?

The ideology and approach of Thatcherism, acutely analysed in a series of articles in *Marxism Today*, seems only a partial explanation. Emphasis on the 'strong state', together with monetarist policies and reliance on the primacy of market forces in determining economic development certainly underlies the deliberate policy of shoring up the private and downgrading the public sector. But the clear elitist policy imposing new systems of differentiation across the whole field of education, overtly pursued by the present government, has deeper roots than this. It is clearly linked with the scientific-technological revolution – in particular the rapid application of electronics, automation and robotics, combined with a determined policy of deindustrialisation.

These developments offer what are basically two options. The first involves reliance on market forces for the application and development of the new technology, and, in relation to this, confines access to the knowledge and essential new languages and skills only to an elite selected through a carefully structured and hierarchic educational system. On this option, the mass of the people are excluded from access to this knowledge and related skills, and given instead a low level of education in 'the basics' together with what is now known as 'social and life skills', measures now dressed up in the rhetoric of the new vocationalism.

This is the option that has, not surprisingly, been chosen by the present government – one that ties in very precisely with its ideology. The 'policy' embodies a lack of planning in terms of economic development, the creation of mass unemployment, and, as the essential concomitant, close attention to the restructuring of education as a crucial instrument for gaining consent.

But there is a second option, the democratic option. This is based on the standpoint that the scientific-technological revolution gives the conditions for, and even necessitates, raising the educational level of the whole population, with the clear aim of ensuring that *all* are capable of mastering the scientific principles underlying the new technology, of operating it, and of ensuring that it be directed to realising its full potential for human and social development. This option implies that the introduction of the new technology proceeds on the basis of social planning determined by democratic decision making; that hours of labour are reduced in a planned way while employment in the tertiary (or service) sector – highly labour intensive – is increased, so contributing to the enhancement of life for all.

This latter option requires greatly increased social control over industrial and work processes and development. It looks forward to socialism as the socio-economic formation most appropriate to the revolutionary developments in science and technology now being experienced.

### Immediate perspectives

If this is a socialist perspective, what of the immediate struggle to counter the increasingly clear objectives of the present government? First, all those countervailing forces in society, deeply rooted, and with long traditions of involvement, need to be encouraged not only to resist governmental and bureaucratic measures, but also to take the offensive in a more aggressive and clearly defined manner than has been the case in the recent past. This refers particularly to the local authorities, sometimes defined as the local state, but clearly responsive to local and democratic pressures (as we have seen, for instance, in the case of Solihull and elsewhere). These of course vary in their political complexion,

> this will not be a single exam at all, nor anything like it

but all have clear statutory duties relating to their own systems of education, by far the greatest of their responsibilities. Their standing with the electorate depends in part at least on their ability to maintain systems that have the confidence of their electors. In their resistance to the manifold encroachments by central government of the kind, for instance, discussed earlier, local authorities clearly have an important part to play.

Second, teachers' organisations, as has been made clear recently, can also act as a force of resistance, and a very important one. Unification of the teaching profession must surely remain a primary aim, since present divisions weaken their power and influence. But the teachers are those in the closest touch with the schools and colleges; potentially they can have the most direct say in what goes on within them, particularly if they act in an organised way. The profession has suffered an understandable drop in morale as a result of the rapid deterioration of their conditions of work and of the hammering they have taken over the last ten years or so. But there are signs of a new militancy and of a professional

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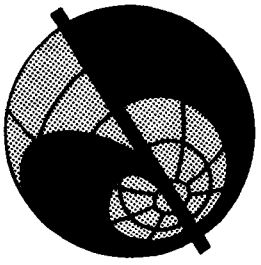
determination to defend educational values – and so the conditions necessary for their preservation. To strengthen teachers' morale, to encourage here also a more aggressive stance in defence of education and their own professional interests must remain a primary objective.

Finally there is the position of the labour movement as a whole. Educational policy on the Left lost its way to some extent in the 70s – particularly during the Callaghan government – partly as a result of weak leadership but also because the Labour Party's educational policy was caught up in the ideological confusion caused by the last Labour government's lack of direction and clear abandonment of socialist perspectives. The situation is now changing. Both the Labour and the Communist parties have formulated clear policy statements covering the whole field of education (and especially the controversial 16 to 19 area). The trade union movement is also now becoming increasingly involved in educational issues. What is needed now is an alliance between the labour movement, progressive local authorities and the teachers around the positive programmes formulated by the left political parties. Important here also is the whole issue of transforming education in such a way as to encourage genuine *community* involvement in local schooling. At Croxteth in Liverpool a highly successful battle has been fought by the community to preserve a comprehensive school serving the locality and to transform it as a centre of community activities.[15]

This article started by referring to a specific set-back suffered by the Government in education. The attempt to deliver a further (perhaps mortal?) blow to comprehensive systems by transforming these to selective systems was roundly defeated by mass movements involving parents, teachers and the local community. If it can be done once it can be done again. But the issues are seldom so overt as they were in this case. Often the measures carried through by government are covert, subtle, long-term – for instance, those relating to examinations policy. An effective counter-strategy requires the consistent monitoring of every move, in whatever area, by today's authorities – the deliberate seeking out of information, and the fullest publicity and explanation.

The present government is mounting a carefully designed and relentless struggle to strengthen centralised control over all areas of education, clearly realising the crucial role education plays, both ideological and structural, in the maintenance of existing class and social relations. But the contradictions between human abilities and aspirations and the reality of a sharply contracting labour market are sharpening. Hence the urgent need for energetic action on the part of the bureaucracy which aims to establish the tight central control thought necessary to cope with developing circumstances. The logic of these events, now unfolding with unprecedented rapidity, is the intensification of contradictions and the sharpening of antagonisms. This provides the conditions for a unified and clear-sighted opposition which, directed by educational and human values (and so the interests of the great majority of the population) can halt the slide towards total central control; restore democratic approaches and measures, and point towards the socialist transformation of education and society as the social form required to realise the potentialities of the third industrial revolution. □

13 *Parental Influence at School: a new framework for school government in England and Wales* (Green Paper) Cmnd 9242 HMSO 1984.
14 *Times Educ Supp* 29 June 1984.
15 Phil Carspecken and Henry Miller 'Community Education in Croxteth' *Forum* Vol 27 No 1 Autumn 1984.

**WORLD MARXIST REVIEW**

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**Who is Eroding the Olympic Spirit?**
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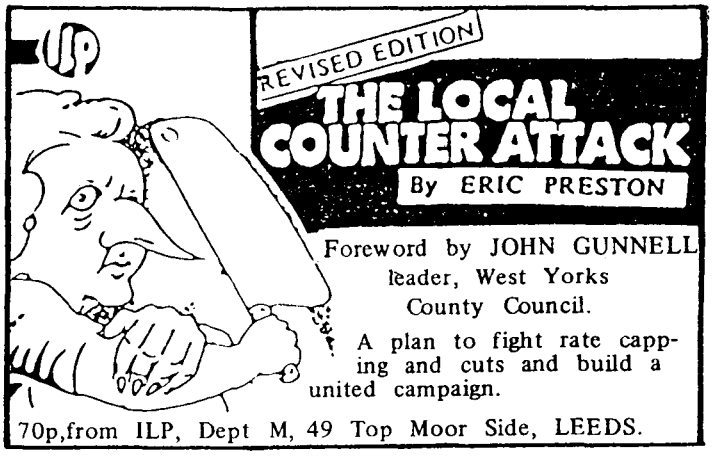
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**Colonialism and distorted aid programmes have destroyed the ecology of the world's dry zones. The desert is continually growing, with catastrophic effects for the local population and for the planet.**

# Dust to Dust: The World's Expanding Deserts

Adam Markham

*Cattle herd in the Sudan affected by desertification.*

THE MESSAGE is slowly filtering through to us here in Britain that serious drought is once again affecting the naturally dry, or arid, zones of the world. We have seen an upsurge recently of media images showing Ethiopian farmers clamouring for grain at food distribution stations, and have been treated repeatedly to the sight of communal burials of children dead from malnutrition. Designed to stimulate our humanitarian instincts and allow us to salve our consciences by contributing towards charitable relief programmes, these television pictures tell only a part of the story. For it is not merely drought that is taking a grip, but also the desert which is expanding at a considerable rate.

### The spread of desertification

The word sahel is an Arabic one meaning 'coastal strip' or 'beach', and is now being applied as a collective name for the countries at the southern edge of the Sahara which were affected by the great drought of 1963 to 1974. At the time it was assumed that this prolonged absence of seasonal rains in the worst hit countries, Mauritania, Senegal, Upper Volta, Mali, Niger, Chad, Sudan, Ethiopia and Somalia was due to a permanent climatic shift. Present understanding is that periodic drought in the Sahel zone is a 'normal phenomenon' and it is not unusual for older people in the region to be able to remember three or four similar periods during their own lifetimes.

Not only did an estimated 250,000 people and 3,000,000 cattle die during the drought, but the process of desertification, or spread of deserts into areas of previously cultivable land, took hold and threatened to undermine the fragile economies of many of the countries involved. An important indirect result of the drought was the calling of the 1977 United Nations Conference on Desertification which acknowledged internationally for the first time the global importance of a campaign to combat land encroachment by deserts. A plan of action was proposed and 1984 set as the date by which the first major assessment of its initial success would be made. Duly published this May, the report gives little cause for optimism, and admits virtual failure in almost every sector of action. Information about the status of deserts is still inadequate, little concrete data is available about the economic and social costs of desertification, and worst of all, hardly any progress has been made in halting the phenomenon since 1977. What is certain is that the new deserts are anthropogenic, that is, formed as a direct result of the activities of people. It follows that only people can reverse the trend.

But what is a desert? In the popular imagination the word desert tends to engender visions of limitless rolling sand dunes populated only by picturesque nomads travelling between palm-fringed oases by camel. The reality of the situation is that a desert is the most inhospitable of habitats, supporting almost no vegetation, suffering from a chronic lack of rain and often consisting not of sand but bare rock, rough pebbles, ephemeral salt lakes or even just dusty soil. Those oases that do exist are suffering an exodus to the cities and palm trees are dying through neglect. The ever increasing number of people who are forced, by demographic circumstance, to eke out an existence in this kind of terrain or the semi-desert at its margins are among the most disadvantaged in the world.

### New agricultural practices

Dependent on both climatic factors and the delicate balance of agricultural techniques with the ecosystem, the dwellers of arid lands command little or no political power. Treated, particularly in Africa, as either a pool of cheap migrant labour or a resource for the production of cash crops, and regarded otherwise as a financial drain on the economy of the country concerned, they are in a catastrophic position. It is mainly economic and political pressure from the governing classes demanding a change in traditional agricultural methods that has been responsible for the breakdown of the social fabric in these areas. Farming practices aimed at minimising damage to the environment have been used since the Sumerian and Mesopotamian empires existed. But discontinuation of these practices results in an abuse of the land to an extent where more nutrients are taken out than are being put back in.

The predominant forms of land use at the African desert margins have historically been rotational shifting agriculture, usually utilising millet, sorghum and acacia, and nomadic pastoral grazing of livestock. Pastoralists and farmers co-operated and bartered meat or milk with cereals, and in addition the pastoralists were able to

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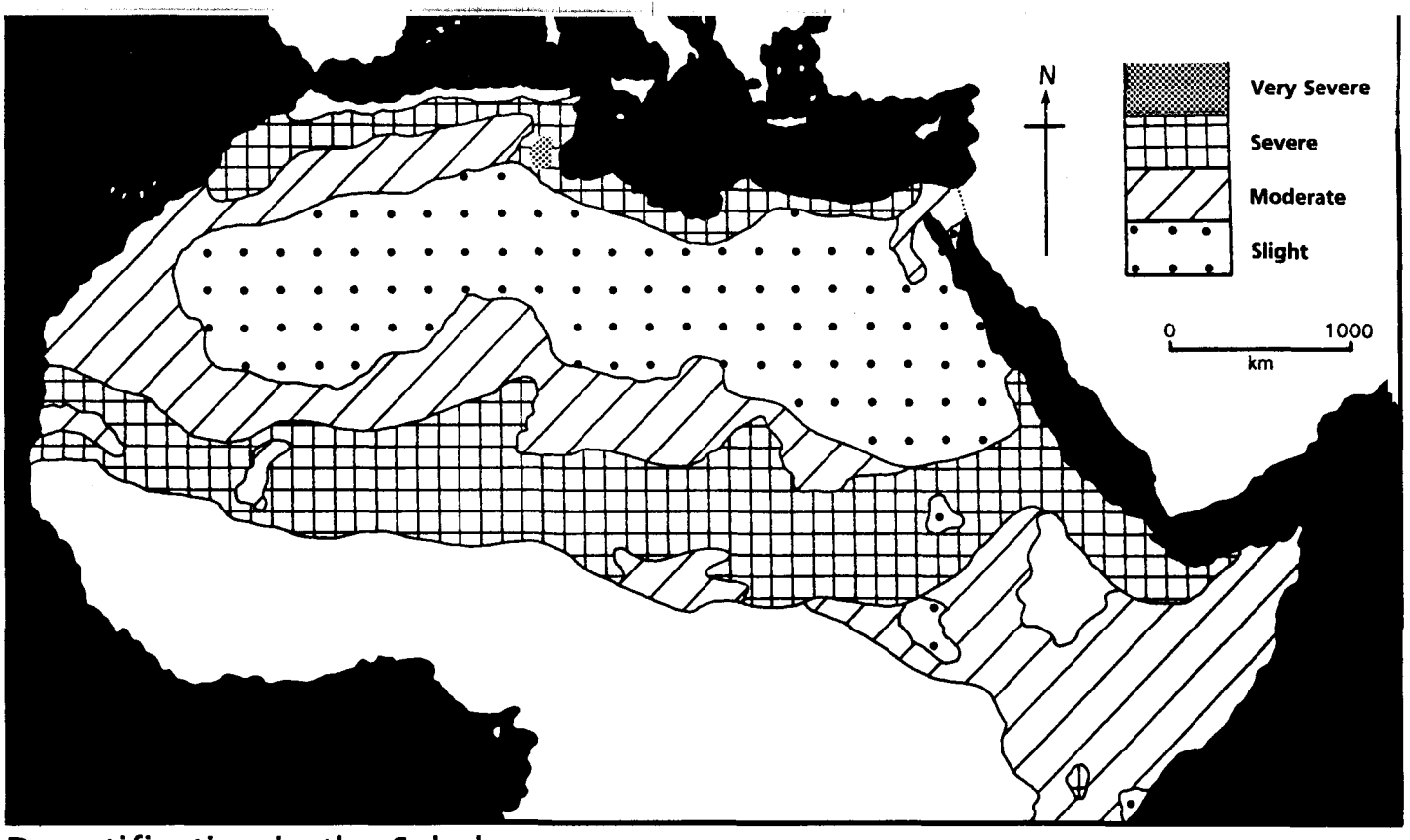


Desertification in the Sahel (Dregne's Classification)

graze their herds on village fallow lands when the dryer pastures were too poor to exploit. Since the pacification and sedenterisation or settling process of nomads was begun under the colonial rulers, these people have been prevented from wandering in a lot of areas. They do not carry out a random search for pasture, but have an intimate knowledge of the best land to use during the various seasonal climatic changes. Since the end of colonial rule, governments have been continuing this compulsory sedenterisation process chiefly in order to facilitate the collection of taxes which was never easy in the past. This wholesale disregard for the nomadic lifestyle, and indeed the antipathy shown towards it has been bad news for agriculture as a whole in Africa. The imposition of taxes also had a role to play in desertification as it hastened the transfer from subsistence crops to cash crops such as cotton and coffee. Furthermore, the desire of the men in the villages to be able to buy luxury goods and cigarettes rather than feed their families well in some future drought meant that they were easily persuaded to change to cash crops.

These types of socio-economic changes which have been occurring over the last 150 years are central to the international problem of desertification. Unless ways are found of reversing these new agricultural trends which are contributing in large measure to the desertification threat to 20% of the world's land surface and 350 million of its population, irreversible damage to the environment is inevitable. Although Africa is the worst affected region, with the largest and most helpless population, accelerating damage is also being experienced in Asia and South America. It is only in the USSR, China and Mongolia, North America and Australia that significant progress is being made in rehabilitating degraded dry soils. As usual the low-income developing countries are the ones with the worst problems but the least amount of capital to invest in solving them. Yet the benefits of spending on anti-desertification measures are obvious when one considers that the estimated direct annual cost of the problem is over 26 billion dollars through lost agricultural production alone. The UN claims that 90 billion dollars spent over the next twenty years would be sufficient to substantially prevent further desert increase.

**Causes of desertification**

Although historically desert growth has been attributed to drought and climatic change, and more recently to that favourite catchword for disaster, over-population, the most important aspect of the problem is irrational land use. This is not to deny that climate is a factor, or that increased population stress on shrinking areas of productive land is not problematic, but to say that the primary factors are related to the changes in traditional agricultural practices. The four main causes of desertification are over-cultivation of poor soils, over-grazing of semi-desert, serious deforestation and poorly planned or maintained irrigation programmes. All these factors could be overcome, *despite* growing population pressure, given international support and financial and technical resources for an integrated programme of research and land rehabilitation.

Over-cultivation is caused largely by an increasing demand for cash crops from the urban-based business classes, and consequent neglect of rotational agriculture by rural farmers. Fallow periods are reduced or ignored completely, and single crop regimes introduced and worked until the soil is useless. Farmers are then forced to extend their fields into the rough pasture areas where the nomads would normally graze their herds. Nomads are thus shifted into the truly marginal lands at the desert's edge, where livestock totally denude the vegetation and disrupt the soil with their hooves giving rise to erosion. A veterinary revolution that concentrated primarily on keeping stock alive rather than on producing fewer, stronger animals has allowed herd sizes to grow and hence exacerbated the problem of overgrazing by cattle and goats. Deforestation occurs for a number of reasons, and is a major problem because it leads to destabilisation of the topsoil and inhibits the nutrient cycle that is vital for productive land. Loss of woodlands is due to cutting for fodder and for fuel, and also to random uncontrolled burning by farmers in order to open up much needed but often unproductive new fields.

The fourth factor, that of poor irrigation, is paramount because of the potential that exists to increase agricultural yields by a factor of five if the process is carried out

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economically and efficiently. It is, however, liable to serious flaws involving salinisation, the phenomenon which occurs when natural salts are brought to the surface by water evaporation in the daytime heat, and are accumulated in the top-soil rendering plant growth impossible. Incredibly, in this age of technical wizardry, as many hectares of irrigated land come out of production each year as are newly irrigated. About 500,000 hectares annually. Since a large proportion of development aid and national finance aimed at anti-desertification measures is directed towards irrigation projects a better awareness of salinisation effects is vital.

Often engineers who plan and instal irrigation technology are unaware of the climatological problems involved. Drainage ditches are usually insufficient in number, not deep enough to offset salt rise, and inadequately maintained or totally neglected after an initial period. The latter point illustrates the need for investment in follow-up projects if the original work is to be successful. Irrigation schemes should ideally utilise natural drainage by being situated on sloping terrain, but many governments have failed to take notice of this and have chosen sites in natural basins where salinisation is inevitable. Many irrigation schemes of the last twenty years have turned into nightmares for the people involved. In Pakistan, which has initiated more irrigation than almost any other developing country, nearly 50% of all soils were saline by 1976. Similar problems have been experienced in Soviet Central Asia, Jordan, Iraq and Algeria, with rehabilitation or resettlement often costing millions of dollars. Salinisation has long been a problem in arid zones, and it was almost certainly the reason for the downfall of the Mesopotamian, Assyrian and Babylonian civilisations which relied on irrigated crop production in the Euphrates and Tigris basins.

False development, where outlay is far greater than return, has been apparent in many irrigation schemes and not only wastes extremely scarce financial and technical resources, but causes local inhabitants to view future schemes with mistrust and anxiety. When donor countries are prepared to supply aid for irrigation projects, there needs to be much more careful research and preparation carried out before work begins on construction.

**Disturbing trends in aid funding**

In order to understand the reason why little practical progress has been made against encroaching desert in the Third World, it is necessary to look at some of the problems inherent in development aid as a whole. Perhaps the major point is that very little benefit whatever is accrued by the poorest 40% of the world's population. These are the rural peasants and nomads, who are consistently treated with contempt, and whose position in the hierarchical class structure of the Third World guarantees them few, if any, basic rights. Aid is desperately slow to trickle down to these poverty-stricken ruralists, and the disorganisation and fragmentary nature of social groups in arid terrain precludes them from political action. Often treated even by their own governments as worthless, the poor get poorer as rural development and anti-desertification measures are neglected by aid donors and frequently corrupt bureaucrats alike.

In order to qualify for aid at all, many governments tailor their policies to a great extent around the political desires of donor countries; for example, the speeded up (and violently opposed) Islamisation process in the Sudan to attract Arab aid, or the US orientated military strategy of King Hassan's Morocco. Donor countries are frequently only forthcoming for projects which they feel will tighten their economic grip on the recipient or open up new export markets. The widespread principle of tied aid which dictates that goods and services must be provided from the donor country, and that can ensure a 70% return on investment, demonstrates the self-centred nature of First World involvement.

In supplying the equipment and expertise for high profile infrastructural projects such as the building of metalled roads, canals, dams or wells, countries like Britain, the US and France ensure a dependence for years on spare parts and maintenance programmes. At the same time this kind of scheme is popular with recipient governments as they can point to visible developments which appear to be instant solutions, and they are enabled to channel capital and lucrative contracts towards the already privileged social groups which keep them in power. In fact, capital intensive projects, such as the building of hydro-electric power stations, tend to benefit the wealthy sectors to the detriment of the poor. Even superficially desirable technical developments such as canals and wells can often act in opposition to the desired effect of stopping desert creep, by upsetting delicate ecological and demographic systems. Wells in particular, which have been drilled by the thousand throughout the Sahel countries in recent years, can be totally counter-productive if poorly planned. They act as magnets for herders and subsequent trampling by thousands of hooves compacts the soil, destroys vegetation, rips up the crusted earth and results in serious erosion. Thus wells which may eventually be at the centre of up to twenty kilometres of barren land, can act as starting points for new and growing patches of desertification. So whilst political expediency dictates that hope, no matter how superficial, is offered to the rural poor, the need to pander to the urban elites who hold the real power is fulfilled by providing construction and maintenance contracts. Rapid industrialisation is also in the interests of privileged groups based in the cities, and has therefore often been undertaken without any previous attempt to institute widespread agrarian reforms advantageous to those in rural areas. The headlong rush towards a higher material standard of living has served only to increase the gap between rural and urban populations in the dry countries of Africa.

In this age of technical wizardry, as many hectares of irrigated land come out of production each year as are newly irrigated.

Although attempting to alter some of the more disturbing trends in aid funding for the countries in the arid zones, the UN has been successful in obtaining less than 25% of the monies needed to support large-scale desertification programmes. A measure of the international apathy attendant on the problem is the state of the UN's Special Account which was set up in 1979 to help implement desert control schemes. It was envisaged that it might 'draw its resources from, *inter alia*, contributions from member states, international taxation, donations, contributions from multilateral financing institutions, and interest free loans'. By January 1984 the total amount that had been contributed was only $48,524. Where the UN has made some advances is in the encouragement of international projects of research into the socio-economic effects of desertification, satellite methods for monitoring desert spread, and new techniques for rehabilitating degraded land. Also, training schemes such as those very successfully initiated in Soviet Asia with the help of the United Nations Environment Programme are soon to be transferred to other national

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organisations. Furthermore, a public awareness of the problem has been enhanced worldwide as a result of a concerted effort to explain to people the causes of their hardship.

**Land recovery projects**

Nevertheless, a change in emphasis away from material aid towards education and services needs to be made. To a much greater extent the under-privileged and under-represented people of threatened rural areas must be given the information, training and resources necessary to enable them to work from the community level against desertification. Solutions imposed from outside are bound to fail unless they take into account the local cultural factors such as superstitious beliefs, or traditional collective types of land ownership, which are too often ignored. Neither is it practical to expect rural peoples to operate their own solutions without guidance, or knowledge of the true nature of desertification. An example of the misunderstanding often involved was revealed recently in a survey carried out under the auspices of the Swansea-Khartoum research project. In the area of most desertification threat in southern Sudan 92% of nomadic pastoralists believed deserts were spreading due to drought alone. When questioned further only 2% saw woodcutting, and 6% overgrazing, as even partially responsible. This type of belief is fostered by local councillors and administrators in order that they can blame the drought and cover up their own failure, and that of their political masters, to tackle the other factors involved.

In co-ordinating both locally based schemes such as the programmes of villagisation in Tanzania aimed at co-operative development, and regionally important projects like the North African Green Belt, sufficient emphasis must be laid on leading by example. Information and rumour carries quickly between isolated communities suffering hardship, and the impact of small but successful pilot projects cannot be overestimated as a means of persuading and encouraging farmers to accept changed practices.

Whatever the paths to land recovery, the choices must be made soon. The consequences of widespread desertification are not only apparent in the arid zones, shared effects will be with us on a global scale. Hydrological cycles are upset, atmospheric dust increases causing climatic change, valuable gene pools (important for livestock and crop diversity) are depleted and the social and political unrest prevalent in times of severe environmental stress could even pose a threat to world security. There is a clear obligation to consider drought and desertification not merely as a problem to be solved by humanitarian, sympathetic aid, but as a link in the vital chain of actions that needs to be taken to address the deep-rooted problems of social inequality in the Third World and, by extension, between the developed and developing countries.

The usable pastoral land in the dry areas of Africa has been reduced by one quarter since 1968, the gap between urban and rural dwellers has also increased in that period, both in terms of economic and political power. The affluent countries of the First World must act immediately to prevent further deterioration, and the Left in Europe should work to eliminate the cynically self-centred greed from the philosophy of aid. Meanwhile, the Sahara rolls southwards at a rate approaching 6 kilometres per year, and new patches of desert are erupting around social centres such as wells and villages. The scale of the disaster could be of Malthusian proportions unless aid is allowed to flow efficiently and freely into those social sectors where it is really needed. □


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**Western governments, faced with the economic crisis, have opted for restructuring through allowing the free play of market forces. The US is taken as a model. But can these policies really work?**

# Star Spangled Economies

Lars Osberg

IN THE LAST few years, a consensus has been forming in the IMF and in the economic ministries of Washington, London and Bonn. This consensus is based on a common analysis of the long-term structural problems of Western industrial nations — that they have become too rigid, too insulated from the free play of market forces. In response, it is proposed firstly, to increase the 'flexibility' of the economy by making workers more willing to take any available jobs and by enabling firms to hire and fire as they please and secondly, to decrease the average wage of workers. The first set of policies is supposed to increase economic efficiency and the second is the proposed 'solution' for unemployment. By adopting these policies, we are assured, Western economies will be able to attain high rates of economic growth without inflation. As the main evidence cited in favour of this approach is the supposed superior performance of the US economy, we must ask whether the 'US model' actually delivers the goods, and how its performance compares with the West European economies?

## The American model

The case for the American model is only partially based on the surging growth of the US economy in recent months. Following the record interest rates of 1980/81, industrial production collapsed in the US in 1981/82 and unemployment rose to over 10%, a postwar high. However, with lower interest rates and record government deficits, by June of this year US unemployment rates were down 7.1%, ie to almost 'normal' levels (see table). This ability of the US economy to recover quickly from a recession, without as yet experiencing an increase in inflation, is often contrasted unfavourably with the persistence of high unemployment rates in Western Europe.

Indeed, for the last decade the US and Canada have created substantially more new jobs than have the nations of Western Europe. Although the *rate* of job creation has in fact been higher in Canada than in the US, the vast size of the US economy means that the number of new jobs created there exceeds considerably the *number* which have been created in all of Western Europe combined. If one combines this superior record in job creation (line 2 of table) with the fact (line 3) that the US is the only industrial nation where average wages after taking into account inflation actually fell during the same period, then one has the basis of a simple-minded policy prescription: decrease wages to increase employment.

In addition, there is a quite surprising persistence in Western Europe of a cultural image of the US as the economic leader — more affluent, more advanced technologically, the place where major trends first emerge. The enormous disparities of American life and the relative sophistication of Scandinavia and Federal Germany are generally not appreciated. Certainly there are usually a few American firms in most industries that compete with the world's best and in some sectors, such as civilian aircraft, American firms still dominate the international market. However, Americans themselves are too well aware that large sectors of American industry, from steel to automobiles, have fallen behind their international competitors and now survive only behind the protection of trade barriers and quotas.

Industries may receive protection but American workers are, in general, far more exposed to the 'full play of market forces' than are the workers of other industrial nations. American workers are only 20% unionised, redundancy pay is unknown and there are no legal impediments to speak of to lay-offs or plant closures. Even unionised workers have little protection from an employer who is really determined to cut manning levels. During the 1981–82 recession, only 40% of unemployed American workers received unemployment insurance benefits. In addition, the medical and dental care which Europeans take for granted are, in the US, often paid by employer-sponsored health insurance plans — and therefore last only as long as one's job. In this situation, workers cannot afford to be 'inflexible' in their aspirations for jobs.

## The US and Western Europe

In popular economic commentary, there is often a tendency to emphasise only the most recent set of figures on the economy. So, if we compare the growth rates of the US and the EEC for 1982/83, we find that the US economy grew by 3.5% while the EEC as a whole grew only 0.8%. On this basis, US economic performance looks good, but what this really reflects is the fact that North America is recovering from a sharper recession than that which hit West Europe. If we look back just one

> 'efficiency' is a word that is said with a sneer

more year, and examine growth over the period 1981 to 1983, the EEC actually comes out slightly ahead, with an increase of GDP (gross domestic product) of 1.2% as against 1.05% in the US. These comparisons indicate two things: (1) comparisons of short term growth rates are very unreliable, since they are affected so greatly by differing phases of national business cycles and (2) differences in short term growth rates don't matter very much (eg 1.2% − 1.05% = 0.15%).

However, if cumulated over many years, smallish differences in growth rates do produce large changes in living standards. But this suggests that one ought to be asking which sort of economy produces the best sustained economic growth in the long term rather than which sort recovers most quickly from the depths of a recession. In this respect, as in respect of the long term average rate of unemployment, comparison clearly favours Western Europe. It is the higher rates of economic growth of West European nations, based on a higher rate of growth of labour productivity, that have produced the convergence of living standards between the US and Western Europe — in 1950 per capita GDP in Federal Germany was 52% of that in the US — by 1980 it was 101%.

Until the 1970s, Americans could argue that Europeans were simply 'catching up

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with US technology. The best period for comparison is, therefore, the late 1970s, since the oil shocks of 1973 and 1979 ushered in a period substantially different from that of the 1960s. To put things on a basis that is as comparable as possible, the accompanying table gives data for the period 1974 to 1982 (although this has the significant disadvantage of including, for the UK, the first two years of the Thatcher shift of policy and its impact in higher unemployment and lower growth). In labour productivity growth, GNP per capita growth, average unemployment and growth of real wages, the record is clear — Western Europe did better than the US.

Only in employment creation does a comparison favour the North American economies. The key factor here, however, is the much greater increase in labour *supply* in Canada and the US than in Western Europe. During the 1970s both Canada and the United States had extremely fast rates of growth of labour supply, partly because the North American postwar 'baby boom' reached the labour market and partly because of a dramatic increase in the paid employment of married women. The supply of jobs did not increase as fast as the supply of people, and the unemployment rate moved slowly up over the decade, but the increase in paid employment was still very considerable.

Most of these jobs were, however, in the trade and services sector and many of them were part-time. Average wages fell, since job creation was greatest in low wage sectors of the economy and aggregate demand was kept at a low enough level to maintain a consistent surplus of job seekers. Euorpean industry did not need to create, and did not create, as many jobs, but the ones that were created were more productive. It is this long term differential in productivity trends which lies behind the narrowing of the differential in standards of living in the US and Western Europe.

## Flexibility and efficiency

But how is it that the US economy is more efficient at recovering from a recession and generating low-paid jobs and less efficient at producing an increase in living standards and high-paid jobs? How is it that Federal Germany can be more successful in producing higher standards of living and less successful in reducing unemployment after a recession?

The answer lies in the distinction between allocative efficiency, the most productive use of a given technology and capital stock, and dynamic efficiency, the most efficient use of resources over time. For maximum allocative efficiency, labour should move as quickly as possible from low productivity jobs to higher productivity jobs. This sort of movement is impeded when it is difficult to lay off workers or when laid-off workers receive redundancy payments. Firms will hesitate to lay-off workers until they are sure they will not be required in future months and they will be even more hesitant to hire new workers, unless they are *sure* that they will not have to lay them off in the future.

When demand turns down in a recession, it will be a while before employment falls, since firms will wait to see if the recession is going to be a short and mild one, but a severe recession will leave firms hesitant to rehire the workers they have so painfully made redundant. A more flexible economy will be more efficient, in the allocative sense, since workers move more rapidly from firm to firm and employment will recover more quickly after a recession.

Among developed countries, the polar case of a 'flexible' economy is the US, while Canada's unionisation rate of 38% and more generous social welfare legislation puts it a bit closer to the European model. In both countries workers have few legal protections against lay-offs and in both industrial relations are marked by a high level of conflict. Labour is easily hired and fired, but union/firm negotiations are highly legalistic and centre around the pay and conditions of precisely defined jobs – which creates endless points of friction when firms attempt to change working practices. The UK has had a less legalistic industrial relations framework, but a higher rate of unionisation. Compared to North America, British workers have been more cushioned by the welfare state against the consequences of unemployment, although compared to Europe they have relatively fewer legal or institutional protections against being sacked or made redundant. For many years econo-

| | USA | Canada | UK | France | Germany | Italy | Japan | Sweden |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Unemployment rate *First Q. 1984*[1] | 7.8 | 11.3 | 13.3 | 8.5 | 7.7 | (N.A.) | 2.7 | 3.2 |
| % employment increase. *1974/82*[2] | 15.6 | 22 | –4.7 | 0 | –1.7 | 5.9 | 6.0 | 6.6 |
| Real wages change *1974/81*[3] | –7.5 | 5.3 | 3.3 | 21 | 13.5 | (N.A.) | 12 | (N.A.) |
| Average unemployment rate *1974/81*[4] | 6.9 | 7.3 | 6.3 | 5.3 | 3.4 | 3.6 | 1.9 | 1.9 |
| % Labour Force growth *1974/81*[5] | 19.4 | 23 | 3.6 | 5.0 | 1.9 | 6.4 | 7.4 | 7.5 |
| GNP per Capita annual rate of increase *1975/80*[6] | 2.6 | 1.9 | 1.6 | 2.9 | 3.7 | 3.4 | 4.2 | 0.9 |
| Labour Productivity annual growth *1975/80 (manufacturing only)*[7] | 1.7 | 2.3 | 2.7 | 5.1 | 4.3 | 5.1 | 8.0 | 2.6 |
| Average days lost in strikes (per 1,000 employees) *1974/81*[8] | 377 | 859 | 453 | 148 | 33 | 957 | 61 | 160 |
| Homicide rate (per 1,000,000 population) *1978*[9] | 9.4 | 2.5 | 1.2 | 1.0 | 1.2 | (N.A.) | 1.1 | 1.2 |

1 OECD, *Main Economic Indicators*, May 1984
2 ILO, *Year Book of Labour Statistics*, 1983
3 ILO, *Year Book of Labour Statistics*, 1983
4 US Dept. of Commerce, *Statistical Abstract of the U.S.*, 1981 and 1982-83 (adjusted to US Labour Force definition)
5 US Dept. of Commerce, *Statistical Abstract of the U.S.*, 1981 and 1982-83
6 US Dept. of Commerce, *Statistical Abstract of the U.S.*, 1981 table 1553, p.879
7 US Dept. of Commerce, *Statistical Abstract of the U.S.*, 1983, table 1522 (output per labour, manufacturing)
8 ILO, *Year Book of Labour Statistics*, 1983
9 US Dept. of Commerce, *Statistical Abstract of the U.S.*, 1984, table 295

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mic thinking in the English-speaking countries has, it should be noted, stressed the allocative efficiency of unfettered markets.

The dominant factor in long-term productivity growth is, however, the development and implementation of *new* technology and methods of production. The gains to be had from the efficient allocation of existing resources are quantitatively much smaller than the gains in dynamic efficiency which can be produced by the continual development and diffusion of more productive *new* technologies. The primary requirement for the implementation of new technologies is not flexibility of movement of labour *between* firms, rather it is the flexibility and co-operation in the use of labour *within* firms.

The effective implementation of new technology is an incredibly diffuse process. It is extremely rare for innovations proposed by 'head office' to fit exactly right the first time – far more frequently a proposed innovation requires modification in the light of shopfloor experience and is not fully effective until it incorporates some of the practical lessons of experience which only the existing workforce knows. With the active co-operation of workers the inevitable difficulties of new technology can be minimised, informal solutions to problems can be arranged and suggestions for new improvements can produce the continuous progress in productivity which maximises the potential of new technology. Without such co-operation every molehill becomes a mountain, every problem is an issue of principle and every innovation is only half-used. In essence, technical change is not a once-and-for-all event, it is a *process* of continual and constant change. This process cannot be fully effective without the active assistance of the existing labour force and cannot survive in the face of the subtle sabotage and foot-dragging of a truly reluctant workforce.

**Short run gains and long run pains**

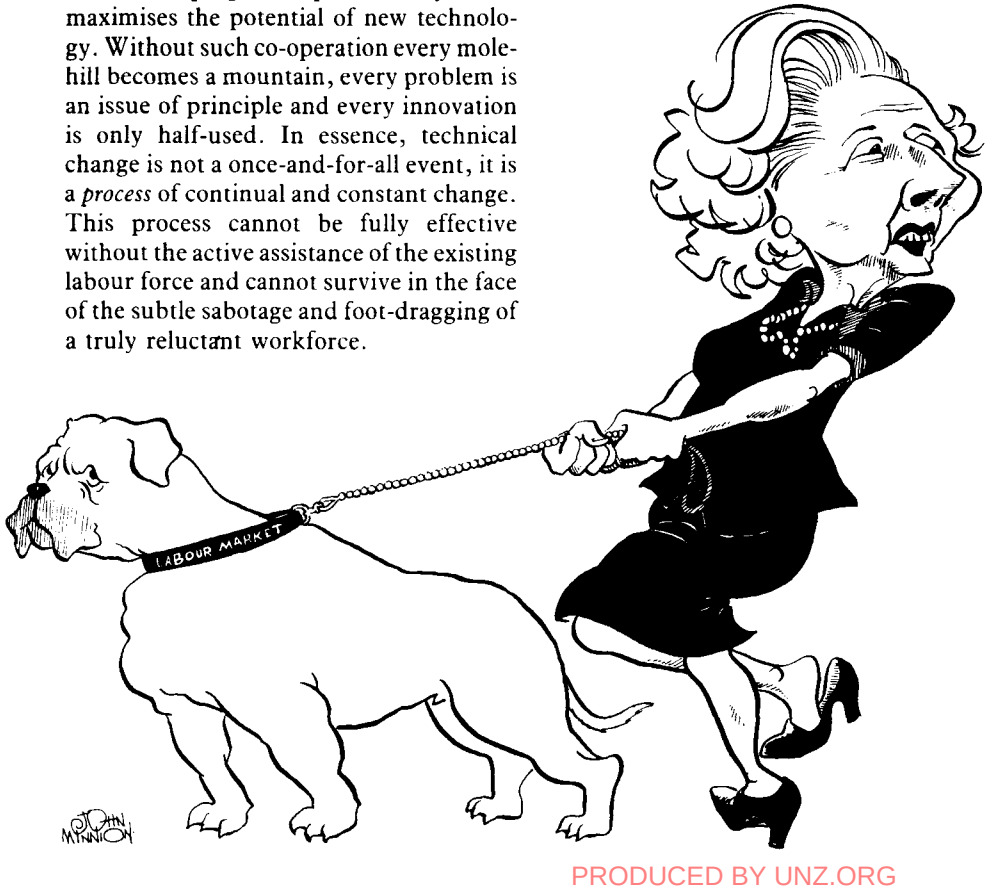
Of course, as the case of British Leyland illustrates, a determined management can force through a particular package of innovations if it can convince its workers that the alternative is the closure of the firm and no other jobs are available. In addition, when the demand for goods recovers a little (as it has done in the UK in recent months) some excess capacity will be put to better use. Although the recovery in demand for goods may not be sufficiently large to reduce unemployment, statistical data will show an increase in output per employed worker. In the short run, therefore, we may see an increase in labour productivity if the government follows a Thatcherite policy of massively deflating the economy and then allowing it to recover a little.

But the real issue remains the long run trend in labour productivity. In the short run, fear of unemployment can scare workers into acquiescence with a particular series of innovations, but unless there is continual increase in unemployment the threat of plant closure will gradually lose its intimidating effect on employed workers. There seems to be a genuine sense of surprise in Whitehall that trade union militancy and resistance to changes in work rules have re-emerged at BL as the prospects for its survival have improved. But why this surprise when labour has no control over technical change and no protection against the job loss it entails?

If labour productivity is to continue to improve, firms must continue to develop new methods of producing the same output with fewer workers, but why should intelligent workers assist in this process? To the extent that unemployment remains high and unemployment benefit remains low, any reasonable person will know that they will face a long and unpleasant wait for a new job if productivity improvements should eliminate their current job. The prudent course of action is to ensure, to the maximum extent one can, that this does not happen. Trying to climb higher on the firm's promotion ladder is one possible strategy to avoid personal redundancy, but it is a very uncertain one. A more likely bet is to hamstring change wherever possible, through both individual and collective action.

When aggregate demand is kept low, in order to 'fight inflation', the requirements of allocative efficiency and long-run dynamic efficiency are therefore in direct conflict. Governments can make unemployment more unpleasant, for example by cutting benefit levels, and this may make the unemployed more 'flexible', but that simultaneously increases the incentives which the employed have to be *inflexible* and to protect their existing jobs by all available means. One cannot expect workers to acquiesce in technical change which costs jobs *unless* there are other jobs for them to go to.

To take another example, in the 1950s and 1960s, when the unemployment rate in the UK was rarely over 3%, hundreds of pits were closed and hundreds of thousands of coalminers left the coal industry, without strikes or major protest. There was somewhere to go in those days and there is something in the argument for a high productivity, high output coal industry based on fewer, more modern pits which can afford to pay higher wages. However, there is nothing at all to be said for forcing a miner out of a low output job in a marginal pit and into a zero output life on the dole. When the Thatcher government abandoned the postwar consensus that a major responsibility of government is to maintain full employment, it made it entirely reasonable for the miners, and everybody else, to try and protect each and every existing job. There is no point in laying people off and improving the accounting profitability of the coal industry or the steel industry or any other

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industry if they remain unemployed and the economy as a whole produces less as a result.

### The conservative option

To concern about unemployment, the present government has only one response – workers should 'price themselves into jobs' by accepting lower real wages and the unemployment problem will be 'solved'. Presumably, wage cuts have simply not gone far enough in the US since it remains, despite real wage cuts, an economy with rather high unemployment? But at what level of wages will we reach full employment? Nothing in economic theory says *how much* wages will have to drop to ensure full employment; but if the cut in wages is large enough economic theory does predict that it will become profitable to employ labour in less productive uses. Low productivity employment will expand. And if wages are cut far enough, the upper middle classes will be able to afford again the gardeners and the maids which they have had to do without in recent decades. Market forces will then have solved both unemployment and 'the servant problem'.

In a highly competitive capitalist global economy, jobs go to the places where capitalists make profits. Whether goods can be priced competitively depends, however, not on wage rates but on labour costs per unit of output, ie wages cost per hour/output per hour. The Thatcher/Reagan strategy is based on decreasing unit labour cost by decreasing wages (and simultaneously decreasing the expenditures on research, education, training and health that are needed to produce a productive labour force). This article has argued that this strategy is unlikely to produce long run gains in labour productivity but as long as declines in wages exceed the slowdown in productivity, a nation can always maintain its international competitiveness. Since, however, the vast majority of the population depend on wages for their standard of living, the cost of their strategy is long run stagnation and/or decline in the standard of living of those who do not receive dividends or employ domestic help.

### The alternative

Socialists clearly want an economic strategy that provides *increases* in the standard of living of the working class. Socialists, therefore, have to concentrate on output per hour. Only countries with full employment have been able to reconcile the requirements of allocative and dynamic efficiency in the long term and only with increasing output per hour can consumption per worker increase in the long term. The first step in a socialist economic programme has to be a full employment policy. Agreement on this much is easy – but the remaining choices are tougher.

Far too many on the Left seem to think that either an increase in government spending or 'planning' is all that we need to think about. Too often 'efficiency' is a word that is said with a sneer and contrasted with the comfortable, familiar world of life-as-we-know-it. But change is a continual process and if Britain doesn't change while others do, the UK will move relentlessly 'down market' in world trade, with British workers earning ever lower fractions of wages elsewhere. With less efficient industries there is less surplus, and less for workers, either under capitalism or under socialism.

If we want the standard of living of ordinary people to rise, we must therefore advocate policies that encourage both allocative and dynamic efficiency. We must accept the need for flexibility and change within firms. We must accept also that people will move between regions and will leave some industries and go to others. To be specific – we must recognise that the fight to stop plant closures makes a great deal of sense when there are no jobs for workers to go to – but it would make very little sense if there were good jobs available elsewhere. A successful socialist economic policy would maintain full employment and increase productivity so that real wages can rise – and a successful socialist economic policy would also have to close some plants, on purely economic grounds.

In addition, a socialist economic strategy will have to recognise the changing role of manufacturing. The long run trend of technological development is that fewer people are required to produce goods and more to produce services. Agriculture, mining and forestry in developed nations provide the raw material for all our goods, but require the labour of less than 7% of the labour force. As the fabrication of those raw materials becomes more knowledge intensive, it too will require fewer workers in direct production. The 'automated factory' is today a rarity, but the trend in that direction is clear.

If goods production requires fewer workers, in a market economy there will be more unemployment and more private services for the affluent. In a socialist economy one would like to see no unemployment and more publicly available services. There are a vast number of public needs which remain unfulfilled, ranging from more beautiful streets to care for the sick and the elderly, so the problem is not one of finding socially useful public services. Rather the problem for socialists lies in recognising that large bureaucracies have not historically been very good at providing services to people in a way that is both efficient and considerate. We need therefore to emphasise that a full employment policy based on public services would be one where those services are provided on a decentralised basis, openly accountable and locally responsible.

### Conclusion

The consensus of the new Right is correct in recognising that the rigidities of the welfare state imply that European economies recover more slowly from a recession and that allocative efficiency would improve if they were to become more market orientated, on the US model. This consensus fails to recognise, however, that the gains in dynamic efficiency which in the long run are so much larger cannot be achieved if high unemployment and reduced social welfare benefits make job loss very expensive for individual workers. The benefit of shifting to a more purely market oriented economy, on the US model, is a short run increase in productivity – the cost is a long-run decline in efficiency, as the historical record clearly shows. □

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Channel Five

# STREET DANCING

## Chris Savage-King

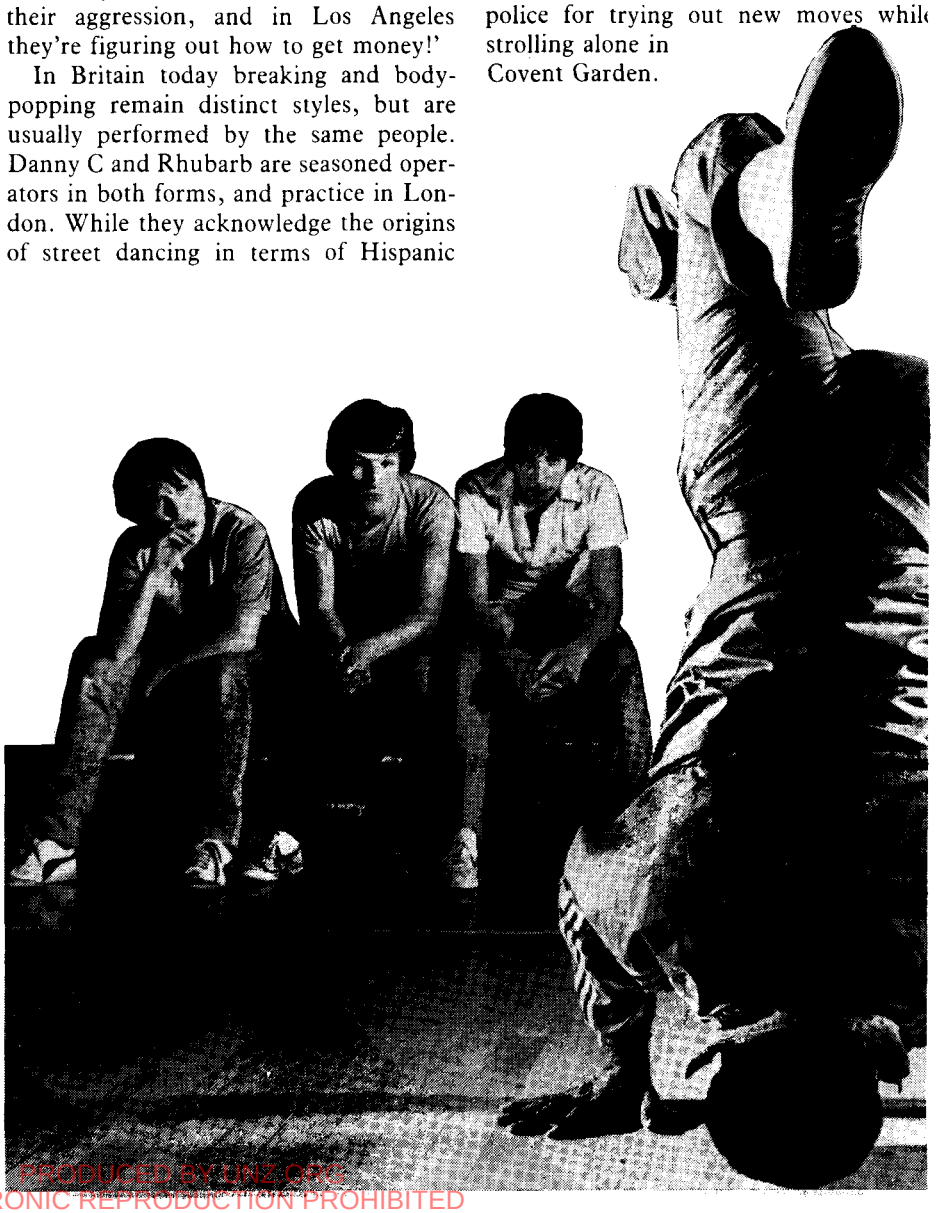
Street dancing has been established as the new street theatre for two years in this country. Its innovations are exciting and of instant appeal. The movements, be they frenetic as in break-dancing or cooler and slicker as in body-popping, present a more arresting face than previous street arts. Furthermore they are practiced not by disaffected, professionally-trained members of the middle class, but urban black youths who have taught themselves.

What might be viewed as a means of entertainment or when combined with busking, a means of making money, in fact has more complex origins. Laurie Booth is a dancer and choreographer who has studied the ancient martial art form Capoeira, which he cites as an influence on today's break-dancers. Capoeira comprises many of the aesthetic qualities of break-dancing, including playing with balance, floor work, and locking. It is believed to have been evolved in parts of Africa, and been transported during the slave traffics.

In slave quarters and market places the style was then 'played' both as a form of amusement and a means of self defence: 'It was the beginnings of some sort of consciousness to do with resistance,' explains Booth. 'It worked on two levels — cultural resistance, which seems to revolve around asserting oneself in a very hostile environment, and doing so with a certain style, and secondly the very practical needs of being able to defend oneself physically'. There is also evidence of the style's existence during the seventeeth century Dutch invasion of Portugal, and later in Brazil when at the time of rising towns, it was practised by a variety of lumpenproletariat as a fighting form. It was highly illegal then, and confrontations with the police are still a regular feature of Capoeira as it is established in Rio de Janeiro today.

During the past seven years many Capoeirista have set themselves up in San Francisco and New York. This coincides neatly with the time span of break-dancing's emergence in the States. It is generally agreed that New York gangs turned to breaking as a means of demarcating territory: it was a ritualised form of aggression which is believed to have dissipated inter-group violence. Body-popping, while steadily evolving over a similar period in the West Coast, remains a separate activity in the States. Booth thinks the different circumstances under which they evolved show in the movement: 'Body-popping is about presenting the body as a finished product, a perfect speciman. It is performed solely on a vertical plane, it plays to audiences and is mainly employed as a means of busking. Breaking has rougher quality. It is more circular in form, and depends on a communal sensibility — you literally break a movement physically in front of someone and they have to pick it up. It is more spontaneous and improvised. The differences aren't really surprising — in New York they're working out how to get rid of their aggression, and in Los Angeles they're figuring out how to get money!'

In Britain today breaking and body-popping remain distinct styles, but are usually performed by the same people. Danny C and Rhubarb are seasoned operators in both forms, and practice in London. While they acknowledge the origins of street dancing in terms of Hispanic derivations and New York gang warfare they claim that the context in which the ar is performed over here is quite different Gang warfare in London doesn't approacl the scale or intensity of New York, anc while groups compete amongst them selves, competitive events are arranged in a friendly spirit of rivalry, not one of out right antagonism. Danny is also reluctan about making too many cultural claim about street dancing over here. 'Peopl basically do it because it's fun,' he said. 'I they get money from busking or fo appearing in advertisements it can't be a bad thing. It keeps them out of trouble' Perhaps some air of conflict prevails however, in the attitude of the police t street dancers. Groups and individuals car expect to be moved on with frustratin frequency, regardless of whether they ar holding an enthralled audience, or buskin (illegally) in the strict sense of the term Rhubarb has even been cautioned by th police for trying out new moves whil strolling alone in Covent Garden.



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All the forms carry a heavy aura of machismo, but Booth thinks that in Capoeira, at least, this is not as oppressive a quality as it is sometimes imagined to be: 'I've always thought Western machismo to be based on behaviour patterns drawn from the media, especially films and rock music, promoting a very individuated consciousness. I've always found Capoeirista much more generous in their outlook. Certainly a cult of machismo exists — the form's basically to do with mythologising our existence to overcome the fuck ups going on around you — yet it's a means of survival'. Interestingly, while female Capoeirista have existed in the States and Brazil, they are almost totally absent from breaking and popping in New York and this country. In New York girls have instead taken to skipping — a less aggressive if equally energetic performing skill. In Britain, meanwhile, girls are forming their own popping groups, but seem to be doing so in a spirit of caution.

Commercialism has been rife since street dancing started in Britain. It must have been institutionalised, to an extent, before it arrived from New York, and film makers and fashion designers have been eager to cash in on what is perceived as part and parcel of the general dance boom. Films such as *Breakdance* and *Beat Street* are admired by practitioners for the dance content, despite the rather anaemic qualities that often attend other aspects of films. Fashion has always been bought off the shelf, lacking, for example, the DIY initiatives that characterised the punk era, and brand names are a source of prestige. While Danny and Rhubarb maintain they can kit themselves out for £50, more discriminating performers can often pay up to £140 for a full outfit. A sample shopping list might include Sergio Tacchini Track Suit (£50) and headband (£4), Ellesse socks (£7.50) and Hi-Tech shoes (£30). Add to that the price of a Ghetto Blaster (£150/250), some American import albums (£8 each) and 12-inch singles (£4/5) plus the cost of putting these on to tape (£4) and a group of four dancers could have an outlay of approximately £700 before setting up their pitch. We are a long way from cultural resistance and self-defence.

*Street dancing historically was part of cultural resistance. Today, in Britain, it is fun. It is money-making and also keeps people out of trouble.*

It is probably true to claim that street dancing, despite its illegal undertones, has been happily absorbed into society rather than operating as it originally seemed to, as a direct attack upon it. The aesthetic similarities between Capoeira and breaking are unmistakeable though, and continue to exhibit themselves. Laurie Booth mentions philosophical ideas underlying Capoeira: 'There's a sense of a whirlwind, of feet, arms and legs flying around at breakneck speed. You have to possess a very strong sense of centre to be able to deal with that, to be on balance even when upside down, and strong when everything around you is chaos. It's a philosophical idea that becomes physically embodied'. This is precisely what young blacks are asserting in our streets at the moment. If dance forms can be said to physicalise philosophies, then perhaps body-popping, with its comic objectives, harsh isolation of body parts and rippling, quick-fire changes of direction, might at least be construed as a sceptical comment on a technological age. A discomfortingly liberal conception, perhaps, but maybe not entirely negligible. Most importantly, street dancing has been the means of establishing an active and impressive black presence on our streets: the form remains a dazzling and powerful assertion of a 'minority' culture.

# COMPUTING THE FUTURE

## Interview with Richard Sharpe

**The computer industry is changing daily. Computers affect our lives in many ways already but we understand little about their mechanisms and uses. One of the upshots of the computer boom has been the emergence of a wide variety of computer magazines catering both for the casual user and for the professional. Richard Sharpe is the editor of the largest-circulation weekly magazine *Computing* which reaches over 110,000 readers. He is also active within the Conference for Socialist Economists. Here he talks to Fred Steward.**

Computing *combines both detailed coverage of business and managerial aspects of the computer industry with serious consideration of some of the political and social dimensions of technological change. What is the editorial philosophy which has led to this combination?*

I don't believe that technology drops out of the sky and I don't believe either that there is a straight conveyor belt from the information technology laboratory to the marketplace. There are a whole series of choices and formation processes before a product appears in the international technology marketplace and these are more vital than the final shape of the box as it comes out of the factory. My criticism of much technology coverage in other newspapers, and in our own as well because I think we often fall into this trap, is the fixation on the box. There are lots of trade journals, particularly in the area of personal computers, which walk away from the main issues. For a readership like ours which is broadly spread from the data processing, data preparation clerk, to a director of IBM or ICL, you are attempting to provide the same kind of role that the *Financial Times* does. We are producing neither a comic for programmers nor a dry box analysis publication.

*What about the problem of accessibility for the technically uninformed. The recent television advertisement where wide-eyed computer technologists babble away in incomprehensi-*

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*ble jargon reflected the reality that many people experience. Reading the pages of your journal, one again is struck by the profusion of confusing acronyms. How can one deal with that problem?*

It's a constant struggle, and it's one that we are not particularly successful at. We need a language which explains and analyses technology adequately and comprehensively. One difficulty is that there is no *single* jargon, there are many jargons. There are pools of expertise in the computer industry who only communicate on the most rudimentary level with the other pools of expertise. Software development people have their own jargon and so do telecommunications network controllers and chip components people. Walking from one pool to another is about as confusing for the specialists as for someone completely outside.

*How does Britain stand in the international information technology industry?*

An extremely minor part of the global picture. ICL is the national champion and, in fact, apart from the Japanese, is the most successful national champion, which shows how difficult it is, to exist in this market. The UK used to have quite an active and vibrant minicomputer market, with considerable indigenous manufacturing. That is less and less so. Recently three microcomputer manufactureers either went into receivership, or collapsed, in the same week. The managing directors of all of them blamed IBM's dominant position for their collapse. I don't think they should get away with just blaming IBM, there were also internal reasons — within their own managements.

In Britain we have technology leadership in only two areas. One lies in the manufacture, support and development of complex software systems which use other peoples' hardware to build turn-key applications. So that when a large US bank, for instance, wants to have a commodity monitoring and purchasing system, then they may well turn to a British software house such as LOGICA or CAP to actually write it and implement it on somebody else's hardware. The second area is in telecommunications. But, in both areas, the leadership is slimmer than the indigenous industry thinks, and it is being whittled away faster than the indigenous industry is moving. It is in danger of disappearing, evaporating, under international onslaught, in both these areas. I would say its got five years.

*The classic response of the Left and the labour movement to this situation has been to urge a more powerful and vigorous role for the state to support that industry. Harold Wilson recently claimed that the greatest success of his 1964-70 administration was saving the British computer industry through government support.*

Like most on the Left I'm now schizophrenic about the state and I welcome the debate that goes on in such places as *Marxism Today*. This is a world technology and it is impossible even for our present government to sustain its Alvey programme – to break some of the fundamental research and development problems for the development of fifth generation computer systems embodying an artificial intelligence – without including IBM. Because IBM is the most experienced company in the world on image processing, which is an essential part of fifth generation development. IBM got that experience because of a handful of very large Pentagon orders which were for military systems. There are pools of technological knowledge which are proprietory, and it is impossible to have a full line of technological development, or even of research, without such collaborative deals, which mean that the boundaries of the nation state are just totally inadequate for this activity.

*What have been the consequences of Thatcherism for government support of the industry?*

It is an interesting contradiction. While the Thatcher government does not actually consider that the state should take a major interventionist role in economic activity, it is nonetheless one of the most hysterical expressions of national patriotism that we've had in a government for a long time. And that hysterical expression of course has its vicious side, in the Falklands, and its politically inept side, in the negotiations with the EEC, but it also has an interesting side where there is considerable support coming through to establish and to keep established the core of a national computer industry.

The Thatcherites did not allow ICL to collapse four years ago. They could have done so. It was on the cards that ICL was going to be sold to the US company UNIVAC and it seemed to be that the management of ICL were moving toward that and were negotiating with UNIVAC They were replaced directly by Thatche and the cabinet because they wanted ICI to remain under general UK control. The did a minimum to support ICL, less than Labour government would have done, bu enough to be effective. They threw out th old management which was a very goo thing to do and they supported the ne management in its development plans They underpinned it financially too. The didn't actually put any money in directl but they underpinned its debt financially And that was enough to pull it round to th current position where it is earning profit and where some projections on the stoc market say it will earn £50m profit thi year. In the process they've she tremendous numbers of people, axed then all over the place, and have managed think to rely on the good-will of the trad unions who are rather confused in thei attitude as to whether they should fight fo retention of jobs or not. They think that i they do then they are putting ICL i danger.

The Thatcher government has also bee active in supporting the software industr through quite an extensive scheme paying for software development, and fo this to be turned into products. And it taking quite an active role in the develop ment and implementation of new technic standards in the industry by providin significant amounts of cash for instance fo office automation pilot projects, both in ternally (eg, in the Department of Trad and Industry) and externally. It is als going to pump a considerable amount cash into the Alvey programme for fift generation development. So the hysteric patriotism of Thatcher has another sid which does mean that there is a consider able measure of state support through stat organisations to the national industry. don't think we should brush that aside.

*Another dimension of patriotism has bee expressed in the increased pressure from th US to control exports of technology in th area to the Soviet Union and* Computing *ha been very critical of some of these restriction: Is the policy to be taken at face value or is it a attempt by the US to maintain dominanc over its capitalist competitors as well?*

I think it's both. I would expect the US t act in its best interests, as it saw it interests – that's what a state is meant to d – and that's particularly what a capitali

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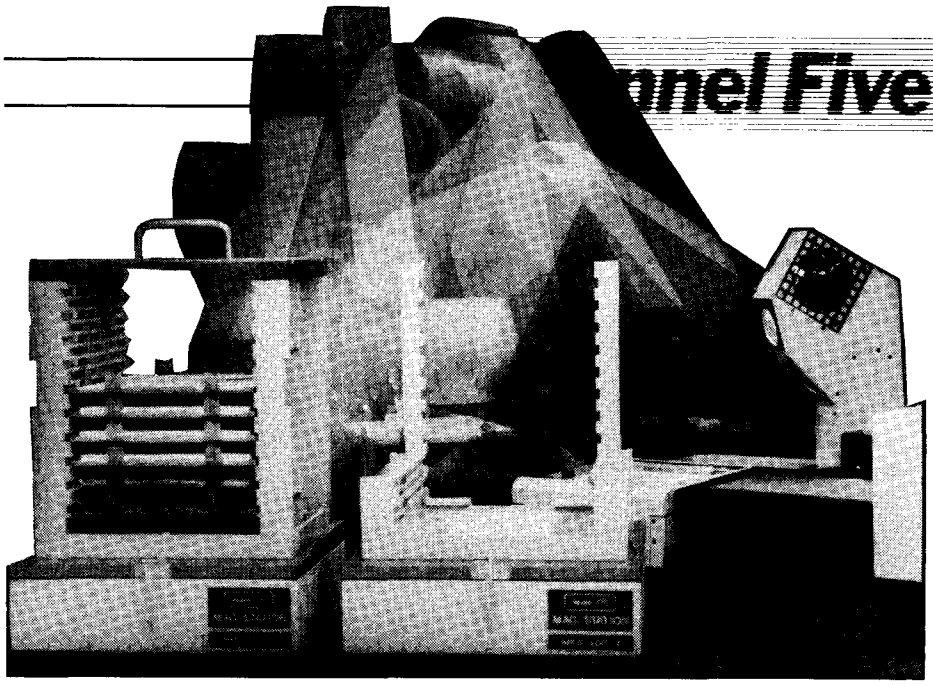

*3M robotic system. The inspection is human operated but the movement of the product from one stage to another handled robotically.*

ate is meant to do. There is some confu-on however within the US amonst policy iakers, about what the best interest is ecause it is the home of so many multina-onals who in fact need looser not tighter arriers. IBM has vociferously, both in iis country and in the US, opposed the vo pieces of legislation concerning licenc-ig arrangements now in the US Congress. here are two other elements that I don't ke about it. One is the clamp-down on hat was perceived as a tremendous nount of industrial espionage going on by ie USSR. The amount of industrial spionage is not particularly new and I on't believe it's as high as the US claims. is basically a tactic of cold war scare-ongering and that's why I'm concerned bout it. The second thing is Reagan's ectoral desire to prove he is tough with ie commies. It is for these reasons that I so oppose it vehemently.

*'hat is your view on the contradictory assess-ents of the relationship between information chnology and employment. The present gov-nment line is that as one of the few expand-g sectors of the economy, it will generate onomic growth, provide opportunities for w start-ups and be the motor of employment generation. On the other hand we have om-laden analyses, some emanating from ople associated with the trade union move-nt, of massive job destruction, a complete ange in the terrain of work and employment we know it. Is there any basis for assessing ese judgements about the future?*

is undoubtedly true that a large number the start-ups that are occurring are in information technology and that the large amount of capital that is available for investment is increasingly drawn towards information technology. It is also true that the technology is not neutral as the Government would claim and is there to substitute for skill and to increase productivity with lower overheads. Any expansion that does occur therefore in an economy which is flat will not, in the main, come hand in hand with job creation. There will be continued job substitution as a result of information technology cutting into the older established industries, and because the new industries being established around information technology have nothing like the manpower demand of previous industries.

If information technology was actually being applied in a world economy of high growth then maybe what the Thatcherites say would be true. But that is not happening at the moment. What is happening is that a non-neutral technology with the purpose of job replacement and job change, is being applied at a time of flat or relatively low growth. Those who are doom-laden, and I understand their feelings, cannot properly address the dynamism that occurs in the computer industry. After all, in the computer industry 10% growth per annum is close to being a disaster. You're really in trouble as a company if you're only growing at this rate.

*The problem of privacy and surveillance is one extreme expression of centralised control. You have described the new UK data protection legislation as 'shabby'. Can we exercise control over that threat and can this be done through legislative means?*

Legislative means are just an indication of the will of government. That's all. They wouldn't be effective because you're trying to hit a moving target, you're trying to control within national boundaries something that flows over them, that is multinational in its's intent, in its purpose, in its structure and in its application.

*At least it's an area which has attracted some political attention, however inadequate. As for the substitution of machines for human relationships this is a dimension of cultural and social change which hardly figures on the political agenda.*

But it must figure on the political agenda and that 's why we must raise it. There are some people who like talking to computers more than they like talking to human beings. There are young people who are really turned on by this information technology, with micros in schools and homes, who have extreme difficulty in articulating a moderately simple idea to another human being yet they can write pages of basic computer programming.

*You are sceptical of the benefits of the growth of home computers?*

Yes, I'm extremely concerned. It can be a way of substituting technology for human relationships again. And when you manage to do that, what you do is substitute a form of technology predetermined by the capitalist process so that the person who relates to a machine can no longer relate to a human being. A lot of work for people is a relation of a person to a machine, not person to person. As a VDU operator you don't look up and say 'Gladys, I can't remember that order number. Who are these people and when did we last send them that box of rivets'. You key in: customers name, what order number do they have, what was their last order . . . You begin to relate to other people only through the technology. You begin to get your information not from people, not from discussion, not from debate, not from emotional positions, not from handling that complex of intellectual and emotional things that we have to do day to day in expressing ourselves and in being ourselves. You begin to be a person by relating to a piece of technology. It's like being a person by watching television. And that scares me.

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*What is your assessment of the responses of trade unions and the labour movement to the changes in technology?*

The trade unions within the computer industry have become too tied up by seeing themselves as part of a national industry which must be supported and therefore, in the past, they have not defended themselves and the officials have not adequately defended the members. They have not adequately challenged and criticised the plans that are being put forward, for instance, by ICL, and they rely on the combine committees to actually do the task that the officials should be doing. I'm glad to see that the ICL combine, for instance, is getting together a thorough-going critique of ICL's plans. It is without much assistance from the officials and that is a great pity and weakens the workforce.

*What do you see as the limits of computer technology and the significance of artificial intelligence? Some argue that computers are tools, they don't do anything different from previous tools, but are simply more sophisticated and can cope with information. On the other hand there is the view that the development of artificial intelligence will take over functions that have traditionally been solely the preserve of the human. Can we make judgements about this or is it just the world of science fiction?*

No, it's not the world of science fiction and we can make judgements about it. Can I try and explain it this way – if you take a clock it does not know the time, it shows you what the time is. A computer system will, in my estimation, never know anything. It will always be a series of pulses which we then interpret, in increasingly sophisticated ways, laying increasingly sophisticated software into those basic processes of pushing currents around electronic circuits, to massage those pulses so that they look like something to us and to the computer systems.

You can establish within a computer system an ability to analyse according to present rules and then, according to heuristic rules, so that the computer, by analysing one set of problems, begins to build itself tools to analyse other more complex problems. A clock divides up time for us. In the past few of us had clocks and a century and a half ago there we variations in what was considered to actual time. The development of the ra way system established a unified tin pattern across the country by literal placing a clock on a train and setting tl clock on each station as you went by.

Today a lot of our life is determined ir much more time-conscious fashion than was in an earlier industrial society, or in agricultural society. Similarly, the impa of computer technology is long-term ai lies much more in changes of attitude, ai an integration of those tools and techr ques into a social and political fabric, th in the computer beginning to take over

Now consider what would happen given that clocks are now regulating tin for us – if there was a small group of peop able to regulate that time. We would be ir position where that group of people dete mined a lot of our activity. With inform tion intelligence systems based on comp ters we are moving towards a positi where a very small group of people will able to do that, and there are no instit tions, structures, or methods of democr tic control, in present day capitalism, stop that process.

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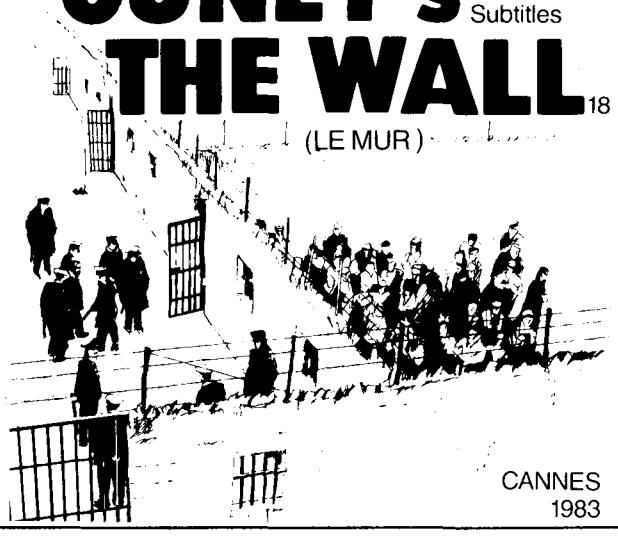

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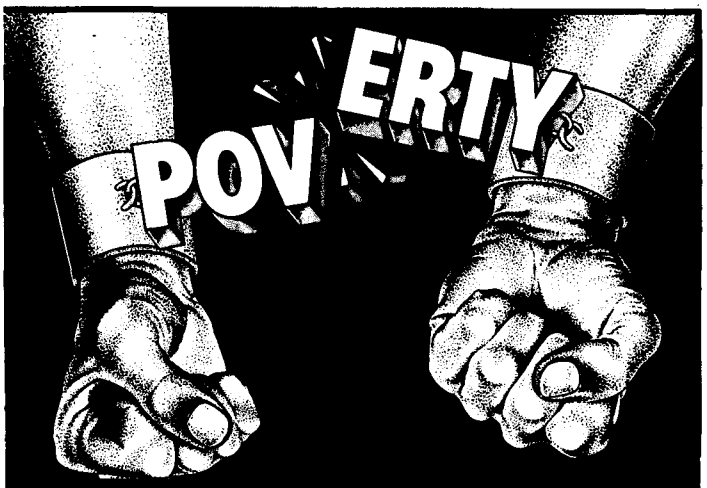


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# REVIEWS

## Law and Order

**Law and Disorder**
John Alderson, *Hamish Hamilton £8.95*
**What is to be Done About Law and Order?**
J Lea & J Young, *Penguin Books £2.95*
**Police: Accountable To Whom?**
*Merseyside Area Committee of the Communist Party 75p*

Traditionally the Left's response to 'law and order' has been one of two varieties. Either it is to accept without question conservative-defined concepts of the rule of law maintained by the police in their role as 'citizens in uniform' – an approach all too often seen in Labour-nominated magistrates, Labour members of provincial police authorities and the Labour leadership itself; alternatively, the area has been dismissed altogether by those who take a crude class position which sees all law in capitalist society as made in the interests of the ruling class and maintained by 'their' police. Both approaches have led to the same result: policing and the ideology of law and order have gone unchallenged and thus become the exclusive property of the Right.

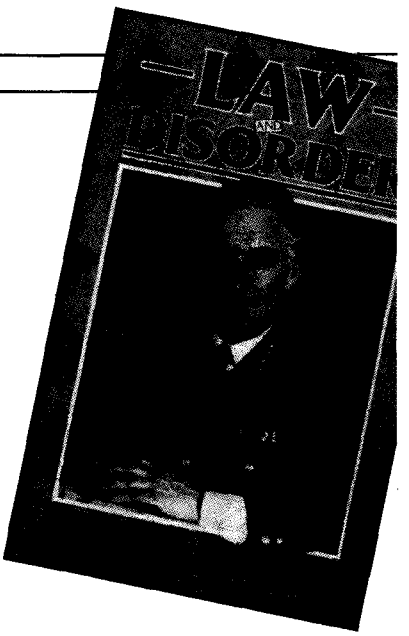
But in recent years challenges have begun to be made. Such has been the growth of excessive, oppressive and partial policing that doubts have been raised even from within the establishment itself, John Alderson being a key exponent of the liberal concern. The inner city disturbances of 1981 and the Scarman Inquiry prompted many on the Left in those areas to take up the question of policing. Some Labour councils have begun to see policing as an appropriate issue for them to deal with and, in the process, discovered that working class constituents are as concerned with protection against crime as protection against excessive policing. Meanwhile there has been a modest development of ideas around the democratic transformation of the police.

John Alderson, former Chief Constable of Devon and Cornwall and now an active Liberal Party member, is probably best known for his views on 'community policing'. In the absence of socialist thinking on the matter, 'community policing' was grasped at by many on the Left as a progressive alternative to the heavy handed, insensitive and militaristic style policing which was emerging in the inner cities. His new book, where his ideas on ethics, policing and 'communitarianism' are amply expounded, shows however, the limitations of his approach.

Alderson's views are, in fact, quite simple. Social order is breaking down and social change is taking place fast; the police have assumed a central role to ensure social control and prevent social change; but instead we need to build democratic participation and ensure justice, to produce 'communitarianism' – 'a society where tendencies towards law and disorder give way to tendencies towards order'. His exposition is far from being a class analysis – Alderson does not mention inequality in the ownership of wealth, or deprivation, or institutionalised racism for example, and he suggests that the family is centrally important for 'social order'. But it is his anti-Thatcher standpoint which is so refreshingly progressive coming from a former police chief. Ideas which would appear moderate in a social worker – for example that social policies, not policing, are needed to cure social problems – put Alderson firmly on the extreme Left of police culture. This is particularly so in his prediction (currently being fulfilled in the miners' strike) that the police will be increasingly drawn into a major political role, as Thatcherism determines to rid Britain of socialism.

Although this analysis, coming from the source it does, is to be welcomed, other aspects of Alderson's views on policing should be scrutinised before he is greeted with completely outstretched arms by the Left. He argues, for example, that the Metropolitan Police commissioner is *more* accountable than police chiefs elsewhere as he has less security of tenure (McNee was forced to go after the Fagan incident). This view is not shared by many Londoners who feel that the commissioner should be brought to book openly for everyday breaches of police conduct, not only those affecting Buckingham Palace. Nowhere does Alderson criticise the Police Bill, or comment on the dangerous increase of powers which it gives the police.

Alderson's book gives interesting insights into the role of the non-accountable Association of Chief Police Officers, (ACPO), as well as the development of his own thinking on policing, independently of the ACPO (and the Police Federation) – on preventive policing, street patrols, community crime prevention schemes and community policing as an essence of policing not as a specialist function. He concludes that in a 'liberal democracy' pursuit of order through the police is a mistake;




the containment of crime should be concern for the body politic with the poli operating on the margins. This is where h 'communitarianism' is developed: to r lease the 'people potential' in the 'prima cells' of society ie, the neighbourhood Here he proposes community forums deal with all aspects of local governmer including links with police-communi consultative groups.

Alderson's proposals provide some i teresting ideas for the Left, although on which need to be worked into a wid perspective of the state and how to trar form it. This *could* have been the role Lea and Young's book which unfortunat ly fails to provide answers to the coge question which its title raises.

The authors posit a 'new left realisı about crime which does not fall into t trap of either conservative (by which th mean academic criminology) or 'left ide ist' thinking. This latter, which is t object of a polemic which occupies mu of the book, is defined by what can only a caricature. 'Left idealism' sees the c minal as proto-revolutionary, the state impossible to reform and the working cla as being distracted by the moral par about crime engendered by the ruli class. This certainly might be the view o few diehards, but it bears no relationsh to the development of debate and thinki in this area which has taken place in the l few years – within the Communist Par sections of the Labour Party and el where; in these debates the perspective h been put forward of transforming the st in a way which Lea and Young nowhe propose. The recent pamphlet from t Merseyside area of the Communist Par for example, raises such questions as le limitations on the role of the police, r tructuring local police authorities, chang in police recruitment policy, public scr

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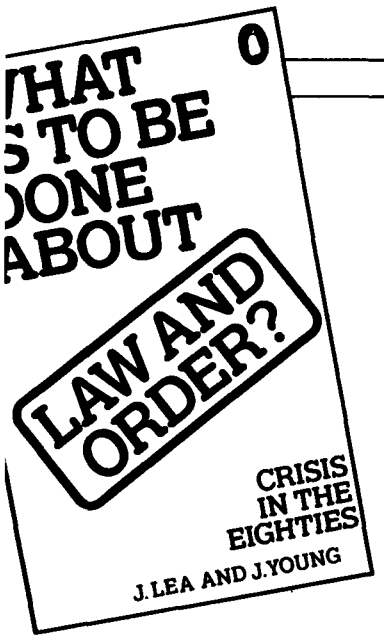


ny of the activities of the ACPO and trade ıion rights for the Police Federation.

There are alternative viewpoints to the ıes which Lea and Young so simplistical- caricature and indeed there are glaring ıps in their own approach. For example, ıey portray developments in police ethods and tactics primarily as *reactions* the growth of crime, street crime in ırticular. Yet the very use of stop and arch against those the police stereotype criminals, and saturation policing of olice-defined 'high crime' areas actually reates' crime (such as obstruction of the olice, police assault etc,) without neces- rily clearing up or stopping street crime burglary. They have less understanding police culture than the centrist Policy udies Institute, whose report on the etropolitan Police, for example, detailed ow police stereotyping affected not only ack youth but also 'slag' – sections of the hite underclass, hippies, political activ- ts, etc.

Their most visible omission is their ilure to refer to Thatcherism (at least cognised by Alderson) and how it trans- rms issues of social justice, inequalities, cism and industrial relations into ques- ons of law and order; this has happened the miners' strike as it happened in the ner cities. In both cases the Government ıs chosen to use the police to impose its cial or industrial policy, with the result at the main problem identified in the ner cities is high crime – not mass ıemployment or poverty or institutional- d racism; and the main problem which portrayed in the miners' strike is the olence on the picket lines – not the desire save jobs and communities.

Lea and Young are so busy denouncing eir academic critics that they fail to swer the question in the title of the book. ıey do talk about the politics of crime control as part of grassroots politics and a need to recreate a sense of community (as does Alderson). But this is precisely the wide-sweeping 'answer' which has been a failure of the Left on this issue. Now is the time to begin to discuss the specifics of the strategy which socialists should have on law and order.

At the end of the book the authors do begin to talk about local democratic accountability of the police and raise some of the contradictions involved, such as the danger of unrepresentative local interest groups taking control, or the technicalities of policing being interfered with. But what form would such accountability take and how would it operate? What about *national* accountability of the police, controlling the political police chiefs and the ACPO? Repressive laws which need to be re- pealed? Decriminalisation of some off- ences? Demilitarisation of the police? Reordering police priorities? Transferring some current policing functions (such as crime prevention, dealing with drunks and prostitutes) to local authorities bolstered by appropriate funding? These are some of the wider aspects of policing which need to be included in an alternative socialist strategy on law and order.

**Brenda Kirsch**

## Hidden from History

**Staying Power**
Peter Fryer, *Pluto £9.95*

How many of us have read or heard of William Cuffay, a Chartist leader, who at the age of 61 was transported to Tasmania for 'levying war on the queen'? Or of William Davidson, a revolutionary of the early nineteenth century, who was hanged and beheaded for 'high treason'? Or of Olandah Equiano and Ottobah Cugoano who led the abolitionist movement along with Wilberforce? Or of Mary Seacole, who as a nurse after the Crimean war rivalled Florence Nightingale? Very few indeed. On the other hand, Florence Nightingale, the 'lady with the lamp' and Wilberforce, the 'great emancipator' be- came household names. Ernest Jones, the chartist leader, became the idol and the Tolpuddle martyrs the folklore heroes of the labour movement.

The reason why some were forgotten and others became celebrated is simple enough. Though equally heroic, the for- gotten ones had one thing in common – blackness of their skin. Their blackness made them the outcasts and unmention- ables in the white-only history of Britain.

Peter Fryer, in his impressive book *Staying Power* explodes the myth of white- only history by revealing how Africans, Asians and their descendants have shaped events in this country. The Cuffays and Seacoles were only a few of the many more forgotten black heroes and heroines in the long history of black resistance, sometimes fighting alone in the face of total hostility of the whites and other times in solidarity with the white working people, but never ceasing to fight.

Peter Fryer traces the history of racism and black resistance to it, through the earlier period of racial prejudices, to the rise of racism as an ideology and finally to the emergence of state racism. Initially what was nothing more than insular pre- judices based on received ideas, later be- came the fertile ground for racism, the ideological rationale of slavery and empire.

Here, to the possible embarrassment of Western historians, Fryer brings out many ugly skeletons from the classical liberal cupboard. Petty, a founder of classical bourgeois economics, embraced racism as naturally as he accepted free enterprise. Locke who, according to Bertrand Rus- sell, held reason supreme in his philo- sophical writings, showed unbridled dog- matism in his characterisation of the 'Blackmoor' as an inferior being. There was no place for 'Blackmoors' in his doc- trine of natural rights. Locke's successor, David Hume was even more openly racist. Hume, who described himself as a 'man of . . . great moderation in all my passions' showed marked lack of moderation in his hatred of black people. 'There was never' he wrote 'a civilised nation of any other complexion than white.'

We also learn that Charles Dickens, Tennyson, Matthew Arnold *et al* some of whom represented the liberal conscience of their time, came out openly in support of Governor Eyre of Jamaica, under whose order soldiers carried out a murderous rampage at Morant Bay, killing 439 black people, dashing out children's brains and ripping open the bellies of pregnant women. The intellectual and moral bank- ruptcy of the so-called 'highest minds' of Britain is nowhere more evident than in their conception of racial superiority. Vir- tually every scientist and intellectual in nineteenth century Britain took it for granted that only people with white skin were capable of thinking and governing.

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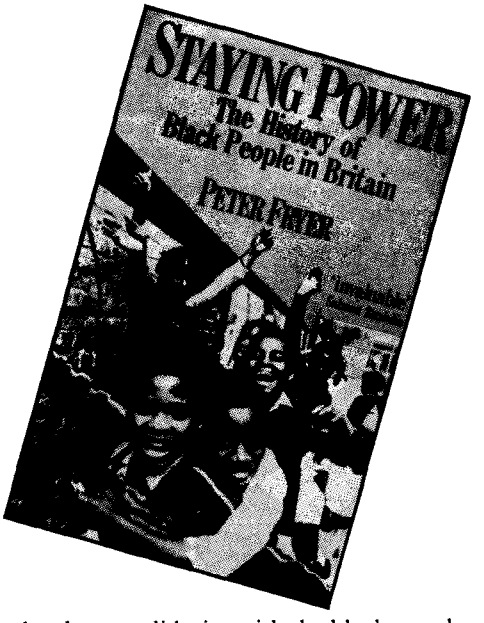
This dichotomy of liberalism and rationalism on the one hand and of racism on the other in the thinking of the intellectuals of this country is, on the face of it, hard to explain. George Bernard Shaw in his inimitable style described this dichotomy through the mouth of Napoleon:

> 'There is nothing so bad or so good that you will not find an Englishman doing it; but you will never find an Englishman in the wrong. He does everything on principle. He fights you on patriotic principle; he robs you on business principle; he enslaves you on imperial principle . . . His watchword is always duty; and he never forgets that the nation which lets its duty get on the opposite side of its interest is lost'.

The economic interest of slave trade, slavery and Empire remained paramount and what was needed was the ideological underpinning. Already there existed the intellectual justification of racism in the writings of Petty, Locke and Hume. On that base rose the edifice of pseudo-scientific and pseudo-moral racism of the nineteenth century. Moral duty and intellectual principle became one with the economic interest.

Racism did not stop there. The working class movement, which showed sporadic




but brave solidarity with the black people, remained generally hostile or at best apathetic to the black cause. The dichotomy of 'brotherhood' and racism persisted throughout its history. All are equal but some are more equal than others.

This book is indeed a revelation, especially the earlier part. But as it approaches the present day, not only does it become selective, as the author himself states in th preface of his book, but unfortunately also becomes uncritical and unoriginal. I the chapter on latter-day black politician there is no attempt to differentiate betwee black politicians of different views. Wh was it that some of those black politician whose politics the author approvingly d scribes as essentially black nationalist, f example Kenyatta, later embraced th politics of reaction? By being essential nationalist, did they inevitably lack th revolutionary vision of so many of the own predecessors and contemporarie When it comes to recent history, what w get is a readable but unoriginal summary the *Race Today* and *Race and Cla* approach. There is no attempt to sho why, despite such a rich history of blac resistance, there has never been a ma anti-racist movement in Britain; or why many organisations, other than those wit roots in their own community such as th Indian Workers Association, emerged an disappeared. Anyone interested in ant racism cannot but expect that such que tions would have been raised in a book such scholarship.

**Alok Ra**

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# VIEWPOINT

● **Tom Baistow draws some lessons from Maxwell's Mirror takeov**

● **Steve Munby casts new light on the Liverpool budget controversy**

## TOM BAISTOW
## Mirror's Image Fades

Brazenly cynical as it was, the Reed sell-out of the Mirror Group to Robert Maxwell, after all Sir Alex Jarratt's sanctimonious hand-on-heart assurances that he wanted to keep Fleet Street's last redoubt of Labour-flavoured journalism safe from ruthless predators, at least had the merit of rubbing the Left's collective nose in a nasty truth it has until now been unwilling to face: Britian will never have a really free press until its crazy economic structure is reformed by legislation.

The freedom of the press today is the freedom of multi-millionaires to buy the power to impose thier views and policies on society by debasing journalistic standards on the lowest common denominator principle. This is the real chequebook journalism we should seek to end.

Whatever kind of proprietor Maxwell turns out to be – and one suspects that the brand of politics he will impose on his papers will reflect his familiar blend of Forward-with-Britain populism and up-with-the-profits tycoonism – the fact remains that three national newspspers with a total readership of some 30 million are now controlled by one man. A brilliant man, but an entrepreneur who has carved out his millions by the toughest techniques and tricks in the capitalist book, whatever his professed attachment to Labour.

At least Clive Thornton was an employee of the company: a decent, well-intentioned and skilful manager with a sense of social responsibility to balance his rather naive faith in efficiency as the heart of good government. No doubt he would have allowed the editors to edit, tightened up *Mirror* management and trimmed the colossal overheads. He might even have launched an evening *Mirror* with hopes of success – London hasn't had an evening paper with working class appeal since the old broadsheet *Evening News* went upmarket and disappeared into the *Standard's* imprint.

But at its best the Thornton regime would have left the Fleet Street *status quo* untouched. Easily the most desirable, and potentially seminal, outcome would have been a deal with the staff journalists' consortium, the people who *are* the *Mirror*, whose £100m bid was given short shrift by Reed on the hypocritical grounds that a broader type of ownership was in the public interest. Had the staff taken over they might have established a precedent that could in the long run have eroded the pattern of millionaire ownership. I say *might* because bankers would have had to raise the £100m, and I don't share Thorntons' optimistic view that institutional shareholders may somehow be persuaded to develop 'a responsibility to go beyond making money'.

Even the advent of the Labour daily envisaged in the McCarthy report would not be much more than a token gesture, Elastoplast for a deep-seated disease. I say that for several reasons.

The first is that it is too narrow a concept in relation to the vast nature of the problem of bias, sensationalism and trivialisation. To effect any fundamental change in the nature of Fleet Street we need to attack the whole bizarre, unstable economic structure of the newspaper industry in a much more radical way because it is this structure that has brought about the deplorable standards of 'popular' journalism that reached their nadir in the Yorkshire Ripper case and the *Sun's* 'Gotcha!' war-cry during the Falklands campaign, the substitution of bingo and jingo for news and the interpretation of events.

I fear that a Labour daily, by its nature and limitations of finance and size, under the present aegis, would be more of a party and trade union noticeboard for the faithful than a real newspaper looking at and reporting society from a socialist viewpoint. Even by its own yardstick the McCarthy project was amatueurishly unrealistic. His £6.7m figure seriously underestimates the actual costs of launching and, above all, establishing its market. And McCarthy's proposal that this serious, well-informed daily could be produced by 40 journalists sums up the wish-thou that fathered his report.

Unless we change the economic set we'll never find a *journalistic* solution to overall problem. We must face up to fact that under the present system ne papers are the only prouduct – EEC s plus foodstuffs apart – sold retail at than the cost of production. This me that they depend, in varying degrees, what is in effect a subsidy from the adv tiser – 30% for most populars, about 8 for qualities. And as Britain is the o comparable Western country with national press, the competition for ad much fiercer than abroad.

Since the introduction of market search from America in the fifties it is t technique that has decided where the go. The *News Chronicle* and the *D Herald* didn't disappear for lack of read What they died of was lack of ads. B had readerships of over 3½ million, neither had a 'readership profile' t attracted advertisers.

It is this basic fact of newspaper life t has polarised the national press betw the trashy tabloids and the heavies, with choice in the intermediate range. In sh no newspaper that sets out to appeal to 'average' reader who wants neither a d sex comic nor a trendy opinion-form background sheet can hope to achi either the mass circulation or enough class readers needed to bring in the adv tising subsidy that will enable it to sell competitive price and at least break ev

What all this means is that only very r men with diversified groups or tra national conglomerates behind them afford to buy and run newspapers, parti larly in a period of deep recession. That turn, means that they take a blatar right-wing view of affairs.

The *Observer* has been the single exc tion up to date, although one wonders h long Donald Trelford's gallant reargu action can keep Tiny Rowland's hands editorial policy. And we have already s that Robert Maxwell is a proprietor of same magisterial mould as the *Expr* Lord Matthews, who said it all in celebrated dictum: '. . .the editors

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ve complete freedom as long as they ree with the policy I have laid down.'. hat was four editors ago.)

Now for my journalistic reservations out a Labour daily. If a newspaper is to tablish a clear-cut character the editor ıst have editorial control. Committees or ards that represent different sectional erests produce confusing policies which dge the paper's line and lead to dullness, fuseness and erode reader loyalty – as *Daily Herald* demonstrated so sadly.

When Marx was one of a collective oducing the *Rheinische Zeitung* fellow ntributors complained that, as they were equal members, he had no right to alter ir copy. But, he replied, he was the *tor* and the editor's decision must be al if they were going to make a success of More recently we have seen the *Morning ır* underlining publicly what can happen en an editor and the party that supports paper disagree on key policies. History ses the question: how would the editor the new Labour daily have coped with verage of the conflicting voices of secns of the party during the run-up to the t election?

Where then does the solution lie? First, the creation of conditions for a greater ersity in which more papers of varying es and taste, including some that supt Labour, without being tied officially the party, could exist. For this it will be ential to change the economic context. bour in office has been too lily-livered to kle the problem on the myopic grounds t any attempt to interfere with the edom' of the press would get it a bad ss. But the hard truth is that Labour nothing to lose by taking on Fleet eet – it will get a bad press under sent conditions whatever it does, or sn't do.

To change the economic context we ıst one day introduce legislation to con- l the percentage of its revenue that any per can derive from advertising, thus nging its cover price nearer to its true t. Our newspapers are too cheap. High- cover prices would certainly reduce ss circulations, which are a distortion of the journalistic function we could well do without, socially and politically, and thus would also spread advertising. To back this rationalisation there would need to be a much tougher monopolies law restricting ownership, on the French model.

Which brings me to production costs. Hypocrisy is the great British disease, from which neither the Labour Party nor the trade unions are immune. We must face the blunt fact that production costs are outrageously high – more than double all editorial costs. And the biggest element in production is the inflated wage bill. To bring new papers into being there will have to be a more realistic manning and pay structure, for journalists as well as their technical colleagues, accompanied by the planned adoption of the 'new' technology, in both typesetting and satellite printing.

Not the least of the factors that make the newspaper industry such an unstable institution is the tradition of chapel anarchy. In its intro to the Thornton interview, *Marxism Today* reported, reverentially, that a delegation from one of the Mirror chapels had arrived 'offering Thornton a one-year no-disruption agreement'. Big deal! Despite its continuing, if modified, support for Labour, and its occasional but effective outbreaks of social conscience, the Mirror Group has been as badly hit by wildcat pay strikes and union internecine battles as any right-wing sheet in the Street. The union's self-interested stake in the present free-for-all would have to be traded off for economic reforms at the top that would be complemented editorially by a Press Charter laying down ethical guidelines policed by a Press Council with judicial sanctions.

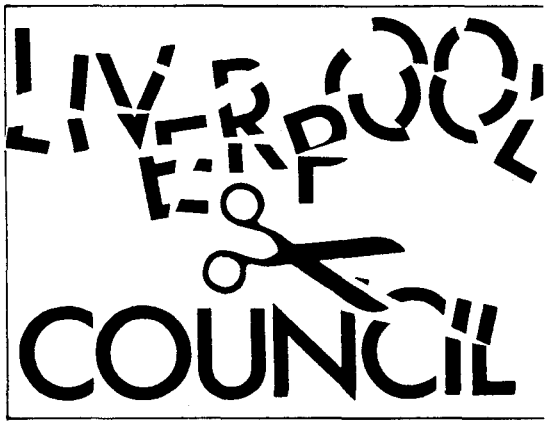
To 'realists' who would write this off as a dream of pie in the sky in the far-off by and by I would say that unless socialists generally, and the Labour Party in particular, concentrate their energies on reforming the press from without we shall never enjoy the really free press that a socialist-led democracy must have if it is ever to tackle the concentration of industrial and financial power that has brought Britain to its present plight.

## STEVE MUNBY
## Municipal Militancy

Christian Woolmar's article on 'Municipal Militancy' (*Marxism Today*, August) refers to the 'Government's extraordinary cave-in to the Liverpool militants'. Based on this assessment he outlines an approach to the coming wider conflict between local democracy and the Thatcher government. I think he's wrong in his estimate of Liverpool and that leads to some dangerous omissions and assumptions about the situation we face.

Let's be clear. Liverpool Council, local authority unions and wide sections of the community at large have clearly shown their opposition to government policies, and a substantial majority of local people believe the city needs more cash from the Government. The Government did, as Woolmar suggests, 'negotiate' and 'budge an inch or two'. Quite how much is still unclear.

The deal comes nowhere near the £30–£70 million which leading councillors were talking about a few months back. It seems to involve £6 million in urban programme money from central government, but there is no evidence that this has been finalised. There is to be a rate rise of 17% and 'creative financing'. But where is the other

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£40 million needed to 'balance the books' coming from? Does it exist?

It may be that Liverpool Labour councillors have belatedly adopted the advice of other left councillors, such as Margaret Hodge, leader of Islington Council. In an interview in the May/June issue of *New Socialist* she told Derek Hatton: 'If I were involved in Liverpool I would go for the most critical areas of growth. I would maximise the financial devices available and . . . go for the rate rise which was necessary to defend it.'

As Woolmar suggests, the six councillors who 'opted out' of the illegal budget strategy before the May elections certainly became irrelevant afterwards, but not for the reason he gives. Quite simply, from May onwards, Labour had a 17 seat majority but made no attempt to introduce their 'illegal budget'. Nor did it try to follow up the previous industrial action and demonstration on March 29 with further actions aimed at putting pressure on the Government. Even the spontaneous protests when Jenkin visited the city as a guest of the council were remarkable for their lack of co-ordination and the absence of rousing speeches from certain familiar figures on the Labour Left.

Woolmar uses the analogy of a game with a scoreboard for current relations between central and local government. In Liverpool's case the game was poker. To play poker you need three things — a good head for figures, to be good at bluffing and to keep your opponent (and therefore everyone else) in the dark about your hand. This was what happened in Liverpool, and if the example is followed by other councils it will lead to disaster.

Local people and the trade union movement were treated as a stage army by some councillors, to be moved on and off as they wanted. Now in defending local democracy, the democratic involvement of the community and the labour movement is vital. The nature of the issues at stake should make it an obvious point of principle, but there are other reasons.

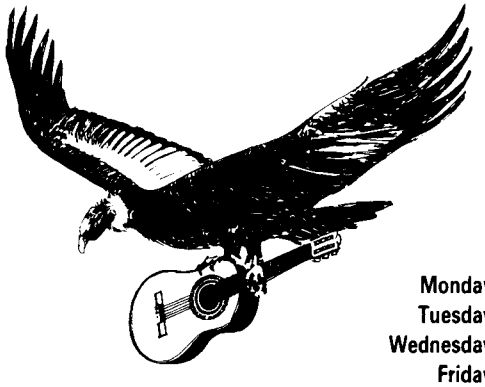
Any large scale conflict with the government will inevitably put big strains on alliances, both between different councils and between councils, council workers and the community. A popular movement that has a chance to decide how to fight and what to fight for is more likely to sustain such a struggle and ensure local councils neither opt out or make unacceptable compromises.

To quote David Blunkett (*New Socialist* May/June 84): 'It's no good saying what would happen if a handful of individua would only give a better lead, becau that's not only paternalistic, it's political wrong. The real movement for leadersh comes from the grassroots.' For th reason the current emphasis on the budg plans of councils for next year is political misconceived.

Any political strategy *based* on the fina cial manoeuvres of a local council, wheth refusing to levy a rate, deficit spendin refusal to negotiate etc, will exclude t mass of the people, the grassroots, fro playing that leadership role. Instead gives pride of place to the actions of relatively small number of councillors a downgrades the importance of industr and other action by the mass of worki people. Some or all of these financ devices may have their uses. But they mu remain secondary to the task of mobilisi the largest and widest range of forc against the government attacks on t GLC, the metropolitan counties and lo government finance.

If not, the coming year may see Labo councils left high and dry, councill backing off as the deadline for setting a ra approaches and other 'left-wing' counc lors turning to Patrick Jenkin or his su cessor and saying 'get us off the hook!


inti-illimani



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# Letters

**P SERVICE**

his remarks on *Wigan Pier Revi-d*, Gareth Stedman Jones (MT y 84) implies that domestic vio-ce against women is an individual l pathological expression of the sions caused by recent changes in men's role. Quite apart from ng nonsense (since wife-tering did not start, or even show iarp increase, with the advent of iinism), this view misses a crucial nt about feminism.

The point is that domestic vio-ce, like all other sexist practices, structural causes and institu-ial supports. Marriage is not a itract between equal individuals a relationship that is unequal ially, legally and economically. mestic violence is a visible sign of t inequality, and it is only per-ted because the imbalance of ver is repeated in our social in-utions. Any solicitor will tell you t the police often refuse to inter-e in 'domestic disputes' and that courts are equally implacable in ising to give women effective tection. Any refuge worker will you that many women stay with ent men because they are econo-ally dependent on a male wage to port themselves and their chil-n. Legal and financial independ-e for women would do more to nter domestic violence than any ount of discourse about mascu-ty.

am always amazed how many n on the Left will pay lip-service he idea 'the personal is political' en they think it means chat about iality or desire or relationships, recoil from the real implications he slogan. Feminism's big dis-ery is that power structures, con-: and exploitation actually struc-: the apparently personal space exual relations between women men. Domestic violence is a icularly clear example, to which r reviewer brings nothing her than male self-pity and in-iprehension.

*Deborah Cameron,*
*London*

**REETWISE POETRY**

nrade Jafrate's alleged taste in try certainly contradicts his de-to hear 'streetwise' oriented try (MT Aug 84). I assume by etwise he means 'by the working s, for the working class', yet how ıy of these people does he see at try events? The truth is that :e events are poorly attended, the on being that, as Adrian Mitch-aid: 'Most people ignore poetry ıuse poetry ignores people'.

am one of the punk/post-punk ts (though I'd rather be called a ter) he dismisses as being a valist of banalism. If I, and others such as Swift Nick, Attila The Stockbroker, Little Brother, Seething Wells and Peter Campbell, are reviving banalism, then so be it, but we're getting across to a big audience and attracting many people who never imagined they'd ever like poetry. We exist because of our fellow human beings, not in spite of them. We're not in the business of dumping the listener in a verbal maze in mid-performance (and we are essentially live performers) and aurally torturing them as is the usual practice of the ME generation poets, but kicking poetry off its hallowed pedestal and taking it back to the people, spreading the word of unity and having a good laugh at the same time.

MT readers can learn more by sending 40p and a sae to Tirane Thrash, 161 Spencers Croft, Harlow, Essex.

*Dino the Frog,*
*Oldham*

**AN ARTIFICIAL BOGEY?**

The whole case of 'Labour's Lost Millions', leading to the invention of a new phenomenon dubbed 'Thatcherism', was based on an arithmetical statistic of the loss of Labour's support. When John Ross (MT Viewpoint, July 84) produces electoral statistics that undermine the whole case, John Kelly (MT Letters, Aug 84) resorts to unsubstantiated assertions.

His argument, that it's not votes alone that matter but also public opinion is a valid one. Here too he is both selective of issues and polls to suit his made-up mind. Unfortunately for him, the evidence is against him. 'The 1984 Report on British Social Attitudes shows a strong public commitment in favour of social spending, over and above the desire to reduce taxes. . .' (LRD Fact Service, Issue 26). Thatcherite ideological penetration indeed?

Thatcherism's third achievement is really out of this world. Apparently the desertion of the Labour Party by the extreme right wing to form the SDP is the direct consequence of Thatcherism. In my naivete I had always assumed that the SDP renegade phenomenon was the consequence of the successes of the left trend in the Labour Party to an extent that the Right considered irreversible. That this played a considerable part in the big Tory majority in Parliament, despite its loss of votes and popular support, is a fact of life related to our electoral system. But by no stretch of the imagination can it be attributed to an artificially created bogey elevated to the world of 'isms' by christening it 'Thatcherism'.

*Bert Ramelson,*
*Sydenham*

**PARTIAL POLITICS**

Odd that Andrew Gamble (MT, June 84) does not mention the picketing, support, speaking and demonstrating of women in the mining communities. The mobilisation of 10,000 women on May 12 and their continuing organisation clearly has significant political implications. It means the strike is no longer about the defence of an industry or even the principle of the right to work. It tackles deeply-held assumptions of how and where and with what life should be lived. It is one thing for the Government to attempt to bully people at work, another for it to be seen to be devastating the wherewithal of life.

Graham Gudgin concludes his article on 'Fuelling Britain' (MT, June 84) with a defensive minimum requirement of a return of post-war planning. This attempt to recall the past is mistaken – the powerful offensive by the Right can only be met by releasing forces we have on the Left. These remain the skill and sense of large numbers of people who understand their work and the needs of their communities. What they lack are the time, resources and confidence to weld disparate understandings into an overall strategy. It seems to me a matter of considerable urgency that socialists start developing all forms of organising which assist this process. For a start, this means discarding a notion of politics in which only the action of men is significant, and abandoning the concept of economic planning by experts from above.

*Sheila Rowbotham,*
*London*

**SIMPLE PARADIGMS**

F Kemble Williams (MT Letters July, 84) is disappointed that he needs to explain basic Marxist theory to readers of *Marxism Today*. The problem is that the principles he expounds are not as self-evident as he believes – as he himself implicitly admits: '. . .*virtually* every problem within this society is *to some degree* a class problem' (my italics). If his paradigm is as watertight as he claims, why the qualifications? With them, all he is saying is something quite unremarkable ie, much of what happens in our society can be explained in class terms.

Unless you are indulging in some all-embracing class-reductionism then you are doing one of two things: either you employ class analysis in an ad hoc way to explain certain phenomena but use other means of analysis to explain other phenomena, or you create an all-inclusive paradigm which contains class analysis and much else besides.

An all-embracing class-analysis is not, therefore, self-evident, since there are other factors at play which operate independently of class. Marx's genius was to demonstrate that without class analysis no social understanding is complete. (In fact, of course, Marxism is not about class analysis per se but about the material basis to social phenomena, of which class becomes the crucial expression.)

The search for (or belief in) one single, simple paradigm that will explain all social phenomena, however attractive, can only hinder our ability to comprehend the major problems of our day.

*Barry Shenker,*
*London*

**We welcome your letters for the October issue. They should be no longer than 250 words and arrive at the office not later than 7 September.**

**NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS**

**Trevor Phillips** is producer and presenter of London Weekend Television's *Black on Black*.
**Pete Alcock** teaches at Sheffield City Polytechnic and is a member of the editorial board of *Critical Social Policy*.
**Martin Myant** is the author of *Poland: a crisis for socialism* and is the editor of *Scottish Marxist*.
**Steve Watkins** is national co-ordinator of the Medical Practitioners' Union section of ASTMS, an executive member of the BMA's Junior Members' Forum, and a community physician.
For **Miners' Roundtable** participants see p 9.
**Jonathan Steele** is chief foreign correspondent of the *Guardian*.
**Brian Simon** was formerly Professor of Education at Leicester University and is a member of the Communist Party's Theory and Ideology Committee.
**Adam Markham** is a freelance journalist and biologist.
**Lars Osberg** is Associate Professor in the Economics Department, Dalhousie University, Halifax, Nova Scotia and author of *Economic Inequality in the United States*.
**Richard Sharpe** is the editor of *Computing*.
**Fred Steward** lectures in technology policy at Aston University and is a member of the CP's Science and Technology Committee.
**Chris Savage-King** is a freelance writer who contributes to *Harpers & Queen, Spare Rib*, and *Dance Theatre Journal*.
**Brenda Kirsch** works for the GLC Police Committee Support Unit but writes here in her personal capacity.
**Alok Ray** is a member of the CP race relations advisory.
**Tom Baistow** was formerly deputy editor of the *New Statesman*, editor of the *News Chronicle* and assistant editor of the *Daily Herald*, and contributes occasionally to the *Guardian*.
**Steve Munby** is a member of the Merseyside CP's area committee and editor of *Liverpool's State of Health*.

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# Update

## NEWS

**Second Brum Peace Run** The ½ marathon and 8 mile Fun Run will take place in Birmingham on Sunday 7 October. Details and entry form from Jim Murray, 29 Upper St, Marys Rd, Smethwick B67 5JR (send SAE).

**Shakespeare on the road again** The Royal Shakespeare Company's second national tour will visit 14 towns in England and Northern Ireland this autumn with two productions, *The Winters Tale* and *The Crucible*. The venues will be swimming pools, sports centres, cathedrals and an agricultural showroom and productions will be presented in 'promenade' style. **September** venues Scunthorpe (1), Newbiggen-on-sea (4-8), Worksop (11-15), Ripon (18-22), Barrow-in-Furness (25-29). **October** Corby (2-6), Wadebridge (9-13), Lincoln (16-20), Poole (23-27), Walsall (13-24).

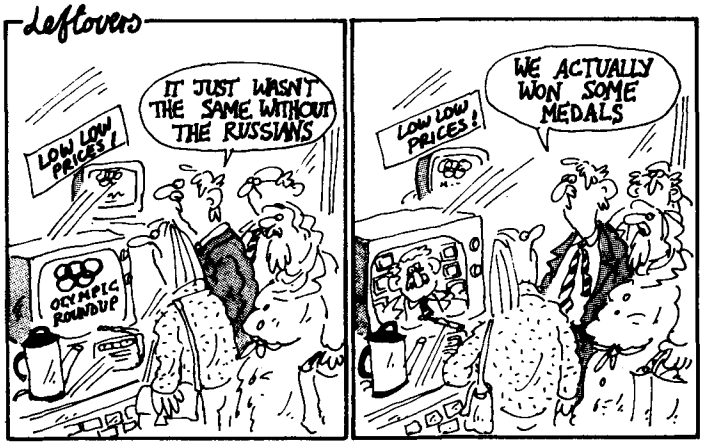
**Rambles over the border** The Ramblers Association is launching a £40,000 appeal to appoint a full time Scottish Officer and to establish its first office over the border. Donations to RA, 1/5 Wandsworth Rd, London SW8 (01 582 6826).

**Inti Illimani concert tour.** This autumn Inti Illimani will be touring the major cities throughout Britain in concert for Chile and S. America. Venues include Cardiff, Birmingham, Bristol, Manchester, Liverpool, Edinburgh, Newcastle, Leeds, Sheffield, London. Details from Latin American Solidarity 01 249 3334 or Chile Solidarity Committee 01 272 4298.

**Pit Families Research.** The South Wales NUM and the Welsh Campaign for Civil Liberties have combined to document the strike. This will include monitoring the implementation of criminal and welfare legislation. A special appeal has been launched to finance this project. Cheques and postal orders should be made payable to Pit Families Research Appeal Fund c/o Phil Thomas and Penny Smith, 13 Dogo St, Cardiff CF1 9JJ.

## DEMONSTRATIONS

**Chile – One more push for freedom** 11 Sep (Tues) To mark the 11th anniversary of the coup there will be a march leaving Portland Place, W1 at 1pm culminating in a rally in Red Lion Square at 2.30pm. Organised by Chile Solidarity 01 272 4298.




## CONFERENCES

**Cultural Diversity and Conflict** The Challenge for Social Science Teachers 21-23 Sep (Fri-Sun) The Annual conference of the Association for the Teaching of the Social Sciences. At W. Midlands College of Higher Education. Gorway, Walsall WS1 3BD. Contact Chris Brown 0922 29141.

**Jobs at Risk-Trident and Employment** 22 Sep (Sat). To examine the real employment cost of the Trident nuclear submarine missile system, look at the alternatives and plan for economic conversion. Organised by Barrow Trades Council 10.30-4.30pm at the Labour Party Club, Forshaw St, Barrow in Furness. Contact Terry McSorley, 89 Marsh St, Barrow-in-Furness, Cumbria LA14 2AB (02229 378049 (h) 02229 20351 (w)) or Danny Pearson (02229 28974 (h) 02229 20351 ext 4429 (w)).

**The World Recession and the Crisis in Africa** 29-30 Sep (Sat, Sun). The 1984 Review of African Political Economy Conference. Plenaries and workshops on the Great Depression, The IMF and the World Bank, Food and Hunger, the Crisis of Industrial Accumulation, Militarisation, Destabilisation and Repression. Details from Peter Lawrence, Dept of Economics, University of Keele, Staffs ST5 5BG (0782 6217).

**In support of the Miners** Made jointly by the Union of Communication Workers and Smith Bundy Video it presents Jack Taylor's (Yorkshire NUM president) speech at their annual conference and looks at the reactions of UCW members. Contact Sarah Mills at Smith Bundy Video 01-720 5976.

## PUBLICATIONS

**Moving Left in Wales** Issue 3 out now. Contents include: Plaid Cymru – a political paradox; Miners' strike; a Welsh assembly; Wales womens' rights committee. Available from 4 Tudor St, Cardiff, price 65 pence (plus 20p p&p).

**The church and the Nicaraguan Revolution** Cesar Jerez argues that tolerance and a dialogue between the Sandanista govenment and bishops and the church are not only possible but vital if the church is to maintain its option for the poor. Available from the Catholic Institute for International Relations, 22 Coleman Fields, London N1. Price 75p (01 354 0883).

**Glasgow, Health of a City** A collection of articles examining the relationship between class and health in Glasgow, the state of the Health Service and the effects of cuts and privatisation. From the politics of health group, 469 Tantallon Rd, Glasgow G41. Price £1.25.

**Double Discrimination** A report on racism in Social Security. Produced by Leicester Child Poverty Action Group to highlight the problems of discrimination experienced by black and Asian claimants when applying for social security benefits. Available from CPAG, 1 Macklin St, London WC2. Price £1.50.

## MEETINGS

**Report Back of the Labour Movement delegation to Chile** 19 Sep. Speakers Alex Kitson, Donald Anderson, Judith Hart et al. Check with Chile Solidarity Campaign for details of venue.

**What next for the USSR?** 27 Sep (Thurs). Discussion with Mark Harrison on the political options fc Soviet society and implications for British Communists. Organised by Dudley Communist Party – all welcome. 7.30pm Dudley Central Library. Further details Mark Perryman (0384 238216).

## EVENTS

**Cwm Cynon Rally** 22 Sep (Sat) With the theme Nuclear War Gam 'Can't Play – Won't Play' it begins 11 am with an Ecumenical service Darran Rd Methodist Church, Mountain Ash followed by a marcl at 2.00 pm from Ynys Sport Centr through Aberdare to the Coliseum where a rally will be addressed by Bruce Kent and Dafydd Elis Thomas MP on CND and Civil Defence. The event ends with a social evening at Trecynnon Hall a 7.30 pm.

**West of England CP 50th Anniversary Celebration** 22 Sep (Sat). An exhibition to mark its formation, video, slide show, food drink, live music, political discussion a late night disco and a few surprises. Opens at 3.00 pm at 10 Lawford Street Bristol – specia refurbished for the event. Marxisr Today readers welcome. Information from Ian Jackson (Bristol 558726).

**Benefit for Chile** 16 Sep (Sun). Organised by Chile Solidarity and Camden Labour Party with live Chilean music, Ian Saville the 'Marxist magician' plus a disco. Irish Centre, Murray St, London NW1. Tickets £2.50 (£1.50 unwaged) from CSC 01 272 4298 o Camden LP 01 267 1676.

## FILMS, VIDEO

**The Other Cinema on video.** Thi is a new scheme aimed at bringing the best of a whole library of films, from highly acclaimed documentaries on the Women's Movement, Peace, Trade Unionism, Anti-Racism or the Media to independent features fro Britain or the Third World, into your living room at cheap rates. Li includes 'Blacks Britannica' and 'Rosie the Riveter' and is available from The Other Cinema 79 Wardour St, London W1 (01 734 8508).

*Entries for the October Update shou be sent as soon as possible (latest da Friday 7 September to Maria Loft Marxism Today 16 St John Str London EC1 or tel 01-251 4406 or 01-6 3344 (evenings).*

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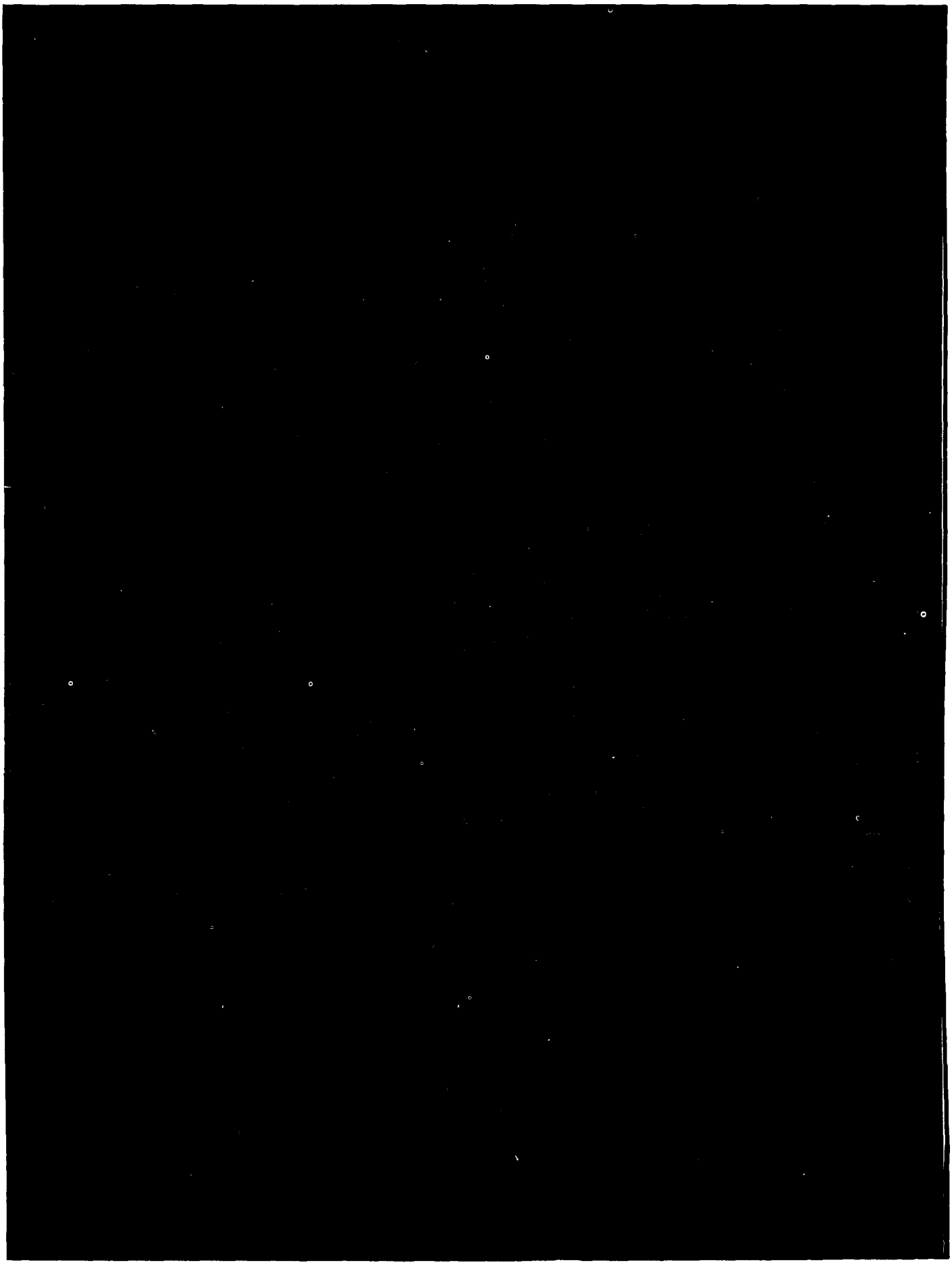

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*Novelist* Angela Carter *and playwright* Trevor Griffiths *talk about their work.*

IMAGES OF THE LEFT *Actor David Hyde, playwright Howard Brenton and Jeremy Seabrook consider how the Left projects itself and ask what image it should be presenting to capture the imagination and support of wide sections of the community.*

ARMS CONVERSION *TGWU General Secretary Elect Ron Todd joins a discussion on the future of Britain's arms industry and its workforce.*

CRISIS ON FLEET STREET *Guardian editor Peter Preston, Clive Thornton and Mike Power look at the chaotic state and uncertain future of the newspaper world.*

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